GREAT STORIES of FANTASY—ALL COMPLETE

fantastic ADVENTURES

AUGUST
20c

The GOLDEN PRINCESS
by
Robert Moore Williams

The Strange Voyage of HECTOR SQUINCH ... By WRIG...

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GOOD BYE DANDRUFF SYMPTOMS!

THE TREATMENT

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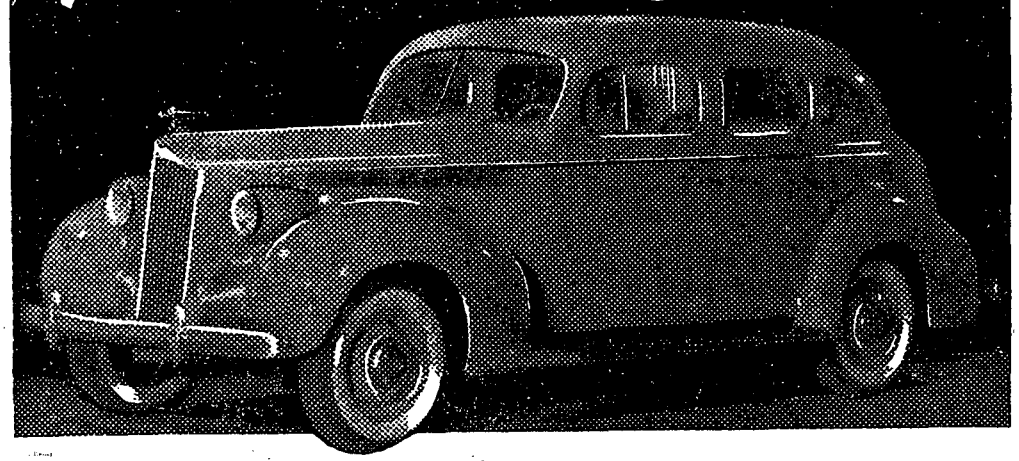

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VOL. 2
NO. 7

Fantastic ADVENTURES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

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B. G. Davis, Editor
J. Fred Henry, Vice-President
Raymond A. Palmer, Managing Editor
David Vern, Associate Editor
Herman R. Bollin, Art Director

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The Editor's Notebook

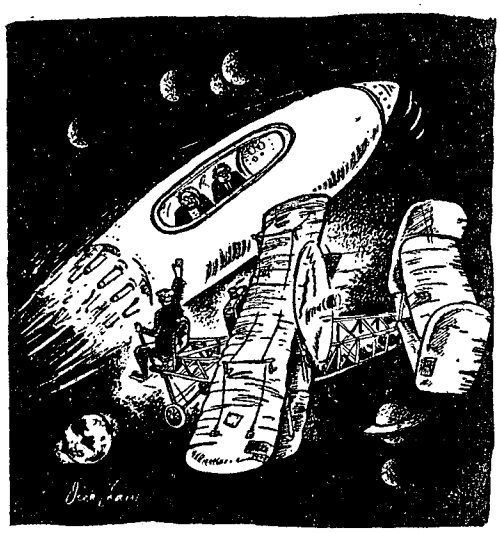
A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

WITH its usual promptness, this department hastens to announce the winners (after a final tabulation of late votes) in our March story contest. The winning authors were Eando Binder, who won the first prize of $75.00 with his "The Little People", and the second prize winner was Phil Nowlan, who received $25.00 for "The Prince of Mars Returns." Mr. Nowlan, we are sorry to say, passed away recently, and therefore his prize was paid to his estate. The winning reader: Donald J. DeGunia, 4248 Delmar Blvd., St. Louis, Mo. He received the original March front cover painting by Robert Fuqua, handsomely framed.

Our hearty congratulations to all the winners.

TODAY, the forefront of the news is occupied by the frightful war raging in Europe. To your editors, it presents the staggering realization that science fiction and fantasy writers who have written of future wars in our pages, have been horribly correct in many of their predictions, and indeed, far short in many others.

We read of the fantastic maneuvers of the now historic parachute troops. We find a new word in our vocabulary, the "Blitzkrieg". We talk of mechanized units and of dive bombers. We view the havoc caused by flying fortresses, by land battleships. And we feel, oddly, that we are reading a science fiction story presented in a realistic manner as an actual newspaper story. But it isn't fiction. It's truth! And science fiction no longer is fiction. It, too, is true!



"Hi, Dr. Schultz! Thought I'd make the trip myself when you laid me off."

WE might point especially to the December '39 issue of our sister magazine, *Amazing Stories*, and its then fictional conception of a land battleship. In almost every detail this bit of science fiction now appears in the daily papers as the spearhead of the German Blitzkrieg. Almost to the last word, our imaginary conception of a future war weapon has come to be a reality.

Are we to go still further along this trail of science fiction prophecy and have a dictator who will dominate whole continents, perhaps even the whole world? At this writing, it looks very much as though the German Blitzkrieg will carry all before it.

TO add to the science fiction aspect of the war, we might point to the mysterious "secret weapon" supposed to have already been used in gaining vastly important strategic points with amazing ease and unbelievable speed. There have been repeated references in the past in this column and in our sister magazine, to super weapons developed, but kept hushed. One in particular was the reputed death ray of Thomas Edison, supposed to have been given to the United States government for a time of dire peril.

Has Hitler also found such a weapon? Is this the reason for our own president's sudden fear for the safety of the Americas?

Even a science fiction writer would deny that we are in danger of invasion, much less of being defeated—*unless such a weapon exists.*

If it *does*, it will be revealed before two more months are passed! And for once, let us hope science fiction is pure fabrication!

IN this issue we present the third of the stories of Festus Pragnell, English author, to reach this country, and we wonder if there will be more. And when you read "War Of Human Cats" remember that it was written as bombers flew overhead, and as an ambitious invader threatened horrors even more terrible than those of the story.

In spite of the terrific pressure of events, Mr. Pragnell has written a story that we feel is the best that has ever come from his typewriter. It has a freshness, and a newness of idea and execu-

(Continued on page 107)

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The Golden

Nick Hall stared incredulously at the miracle. There, greatly enlarged under the glass globe, was a pure gold statue of a girl!

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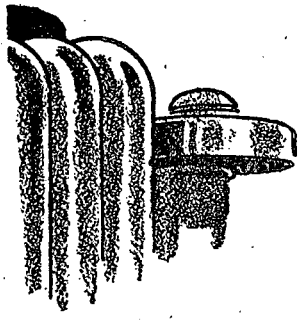
Princess

by Robert Moore Williams



Somewhere, out of nothing, Professor Ross was making gold! It just couldn't be, but it was. Enough to make Nick Hall gamble on it—until the drums came . . . !

"DID you have a reservation, sir?" asked Henri, headwaiter of the dining room of the ultra-exclusive Town Club.

He spoke to a frail little man whose appearance was distinctly shabby. His pants were baggy and his coat hung haphazardly on his stooped shoulders. Worse, he had not shaved this morning, possibly not for several mornings. All in all, his appearance was such as to horrify the élite. It would not do, Henri promptly decided as the little man poked timidly through the doors, for such a *person* to be admitted to the presences of the tycoons, capitalists and captains of industry now engaged in lunching here.

Henri donned his most repellent, haughty stare. He stepped in front of the little man.

"Did you have a reservation?" he repeated. His tone implied that he already knew the answer to his question and was only going through the necessary formality, preparatory to signaling his most genteel bouncer to give this *person* the bum's rush.

"Why, no," the little man replied. He seemed to be bewildered. "I did not—"

Somehow at sound of the timid little man's voice, all conversation in the ultra-exclusive dining room of the Town Club ceased.

All eyes turned for an instant to scan the shabby clothes, the almost frightened demeanor of the intruder, with what amounted to snobbishness.

Henri was painfully conscious of it, and yet, at the same time, the little man was so inoffensive that even his carefully cultivated attitude of coldness in cases like this threatened to grow lax within him. But the effect of the man's entry immediately froze it up again. However, he repeated for a third time his question.

"You have no reservation?"

"No, I haven't," said the little man. "Do I need one? I only . . ."

"Sorry," said Henri perfunctorily.

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"But all the tables are engaged." He stared blankly past the little man in a manner that experience had taught him was most impressive.

"But I had not planned to have lunch here," the little man protested. "I was merely looking for a—"

"This is an exclusive club," Henri interrupted. "Admission is only by card or as the guest of a member. Do you have a card?" he demanded.

"No. No, I don't. But I only want—"

"Sorry, but I must ask you to leave."

A constant stream of diners was entering the room. They walked briskly past, paying no attention to the headwaiter or his unwanted visitor. They did not notice such trash as waiters, and especially they did not notice individuals who looked like bums.

But there was one person who did notice. He was seated at a nearby table facing the door. He witnessed the whole scene. He was "Slug" Maroney, one-time threat to the middleweight championship of the world—until one too many punches on the jaw left him slightly slug-nutty.

"Boss," he said, nudging with a gnarled hand the well-dressed young man sitting at the table with him. "Is it all right wit' you if one day I put the slug on that mug, Henri? He makes me itch every time I see him. Can I wait for him outside one day and paste him a couple, boss, huh?"

Nick Hall grinned at the "one day." With Maroney everything was going to happen "one day."

"If you can ever maneuver Henri into a position where you are justified in smacking him, you have my permission to go ahead. What's he doing now?" Nick turned to look toward the door.

He glanced twice at the shabby little man. "Why, that's Professor Albert Ross," he gasped, amazement in his voice. "My old college physics professor. He dropped out of sight four or five years ago and I haven't heard of him since. What on earth has he been doing to let himself get as shabby as that?"

Hall's eyes rested with wonder on the professor's clothes. But only for a moment. Something had happened to Ross. The clothes told him that. But Nick Hall never looked twice at the garments. He looked at the man underneath.

Henri was about to eject one of the foremost scientists of 1940!

Hall instantly rose to his feet, advanced with hand outstretched. Henri saw him coming, saw the outstretched hand. Henri also saw the steely glint in his eye. The headwaiter promptly discovered that his attention was needed elsewhere.

"Professor Ross, do you remember me?"

FOR an instant the little man blinked, as though recalling his mind to the task at hand from some other sphere. Then his wrinkled face broke into a delighted smile.

"As if I could ever forget the best physics student I ever had! Nick, my boy; I am indeed glad to see you."

They shook hands, a proceeding that Henri watched dubiously.

"Won't you join us?" Hall invited.

"Thank you. I would be delighted. But I—ah—" Ross's mind seemed to return to another sphere. "I—ah—came here looking for a man. His secretary told me that I might find him here. It is—ah—of the utmost importance that I get in touch with him immediately. Perhaps you know him. Mr. Raymond Garber."

At the mention of this name, Nick Hall's face changed. A little of the

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smiling, friendly good nature went away from it and was replaced by a taut grim mask. His gray eyes got cold and hard.

But his manner remained urbane. "Yes," he said softly. "Mr. Garber is here. You will find him at the table next to the wall," Hall nodded with his head. "He is alone."

"Thank you. Thank you, my boy," the professor beamed. "I see Mr. Garber. You must come and visit me some time," he tossed back at Hall and walked across the room.

Hall went back to his table.

"Hunh!" said Slug Maroney. "So he's an enemy too, boss!"

"No," said Hall thoughtfully. "He's not an enemy."

"The hell he's not! Garber's your enemy, ain't he, boss? The worst enemy you got, and the only one. And this prof is toddling over to talk to Garber. That puts the prof on the wrong side of the fence too."

"Not at all, Slug," Hall answered slowly. "But I wonder what a scientist like Professor Ross wants with our astute capitalist, Mr. Raymond Garber?"

"Watch and listen," Slug advised. "And you'll probably find out."

Garber was a heavy-set, florid-faced individual. Later in life, when he reached middle age—if he lived that long—he would develop a paunch. But the paunch was not yet on him.

He was known in the Chicago financial district as a financier. He was a rising man, and if the whispered comment indicated that the business deals which he constantly promoted were more often than not on the shady side, he was totally undisturbed by the rumors.

"I'll get mine," was his motto. "And the devil can look out for you."

He looked up when Ross approached. Irritation flashed across his face. He didn't wait for Ross to speak, but snapped,

"How did you get in here?"

The old scientist flushed at the tone. But he stuck doggedly to his purpose.

"I simply had to see you, Mr. Garber."

"I'm busy. I have no time to waste on you."

"But, Mr. Garber, I've come to tell you that I've succeeded. Since you were interested in my early experiments to the extent of giving me financial aid, I wanted you to be the first to know that I have succeeded."

The financier had half risen out of his chair. Uncertainty showed on his heavy features.

"You've what?" he said.

"My experiments have been successful," Ross continued. "And I brought the proof of it along with me." Ross fumbled in his pocket. "Here it is. It's gold, real gold, synthetically produced."

He laid a small piece of metal, roughly the size and shape of a dime, on the table in front of Garber.

"I hammered it out flat," he explained.

There were dozens of people in the dining room. The stir of voices went into silence at the sound of the magic word—*gold!* Whispers died away. Little clicking sounds came as forks were laid on plates. Heads turned. Even the waiters were silent.

"YOU fool!" Garber hissed. "You come in here and blurt out that word. Don't you know better than that? Now dozens of people have heard you."

"I—I don't understand," Ross faltered.

"Go on. Tell me what happened," Garber prodded. "But lower your

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voice."

Ross smiled happily. "I was certain I was on the right track, especially when my first experiments yielded gold in microscopic quantities. This, however, is the first amount I have produced that has commercial value."

"How much is this worth?" Garber gestured toward the piece of metal lying on the table.

"About five dollars."

"And how much did it cost to produce this quantity?"

"About twenty thousand dollars. Eighteen thousand dollars of my own savings and two thousand that you advanced. And that is why I came to you. I felt sure, with this to offer as proof that I am on the right track, that you would see your way clear to advancing me the fifty thousand dollars I need to provide additional equipment."

The financier's face had changed. At the first mention of the word gold, he had looked greedy and his tongue had licked nervously at his lips. But now a dark flush mottled his face.

"At a cost of twenty thousand dollars, you produce five dollars worth of synthetic gold!" he choked. "How much could you produce with this new equipment?"

"Why—ah—I don't know. Perhaps fifty dollars worth."

"Of all the colossal nerve!" Garber roared. "You ask me to spend fifty thousand dollars and get fifty back! What kind of a damned fool do you think I am, anyhow?"

"But the money isn't the important thing," Ross begged. "The advance of science is what counts. Think what this may mean. It may give us increased knowledge of the structure of metals; it may enable us eventually to synthesize any material we wish. The dream of the alchemists, come true!" The old professor fairly glowed.

Garber exploded. "Get to hell out of here!" he roared.

"But—"

"No 'buts' about it. Henri!" he yelled. "Henri, eject this man. If you permit him to enter here again, it will cost you your job."

The headwaiter, flanked by one of his burly assistants, came bustling up.

"Yes, Mr. Garber. I'll have him ejected immediately." He turned to Ross. "All right. Outside, you. And be quick about it!"

Under Henri's direction the bouncer grabbed Professor Ross by the collar. The old man was too bewildered to resist. But as the bouncer tightened his grip, he himself was seized by the collar. He turned and looked straight into the eyes of Nick Hall. Hall wasn't smiling.

And beside Hall, dancing on his toes, great mauling fists jabbing back and forth, face contorted into a fighting snarl, was Slug Maroney. Out of the corner of his mouth he was saying:

"Get out of the way, boss, so I can paste him. Get out of the way, boss. Please get out of the way. *Please,* boss! I'll get him wit' my left and Henri wit' my right. Get to hell out of the way, boss. There's work to be done."

The bouncer took one startled look at Maroney's fighting face. That face was lopsided, twisted, scarred and battered, the result of hundreds of battles in the ring. With a yelp of fear, the bouncer released Ross and scuttled away.

Maroney turned toward Henri. The headwaiter's coat tails stuck out straight behind him as he dived for the protection of the kitchen.

"Come back here and take it!" Maroney wailed. When neither of the fleeing waiters returned, Slug turned to his boss for further instructions.

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NICK HALL was saying to the red-faced, raging Garber,

"Perhaps you didn't recognize the man whom you were about to have thrown out. Permit me to introduce Professor Albert Ross, who is one of the most distinguished scientists alive today. Professor Ross is an authority on the structure of the atom; he is known and respected wherever intelligent men congregate. We are indeed honored to have him with us."

Hall was speaking slowly, every word charged with icy contempt. Garber's face was growing redder and redder. But he didn't get up from the table. He looked stonily ahead, not glancing up at the man standing beside him.

"Do you understand me, Garber?" Hall said.

"I understand you, all right," Garber snapped sullenly. "And you've got your turn coming. This only adds to the payoff when it comes."

"That may be," Hall answered imperturbably. "The point is, I think you owe Professor Ross an apology. Did I hear you apologize, Garber?"

The financier didn't answer. The red was fleeing from his face, leaving behind it the white of suppressed rage. Again a silence had fallen over the room as the diners craned their necks for a better view.

"I'm waiting," said Hall. Ross plucked nervously at his coat sleeve.

"Don't make a scene, lad. I don't mind the way he treated me."

"But I do," Hall answered. "Garber—" The tone had the sting of a whiplash in it.

"All right, I—I apologize," the financier stammered.

"That's better," Hall said. He had bent over. Now he stood up. "The air seems to be foul in here," he observed. "And inasmuch, Professor, as the object of your visit here seems unlikely to be attained, I suggest that you permit us to escort you to your destination."

Ross was hopelessly bewildered. He permitted himself to be led away. Outside, Maroney said,

"Boss, it ain't none of my business, but Garber sure hates your guts now. You made him apologize before a lot of people and he'll slip you the knockout drops if it's the last thing he ever does. You better let me go back in and paste him one for good luck, boss."

"I know," Hall answered, his youthful face grave. "Well, it doesn't matter." He shrugged. "We're due to tangle anyhow."

Professor Ross had been looking interestedly at Slug Maroney.

"I don't believe I have met this gentleman," he observed to Hall. "Would you—"

"Sorry," Hall quickly answered. He introduced the two men. The professor beamed.

"I thought I knew you but I wasn't sure. I saw you fight several times. That—ah—used to be a favorite recreation of mine."

Slug broke into a grin from ear to ear. "Did you see me fight, professor? Did you see me lick Milligan that last time? Did you see me put the bee on that stumblebum?" he demanded excitedly.

"I—ah—yes." The professor glanced quickly at Hall, caught the slight shake of the latter's head. "Yes. A grand fight that was."

Maroney glowed. The professor looked perplexed. He had seen that fight, but Maroney hadn't won. He had lost by a knockout in the last of the thirteenth round—a knockout Slug never remembered. His mind had been clouded after that fateful night but he still thought he had won.

Slug had never entered the ring

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again, although he thought he was training for another bout. The fact that he trained only with Nick Hall, the fact that Hall gave him a room and supported him, the fact that he was through, done, finished in the ring, never entered the clouded mind.

"GEE, Professor," Slug grinned. "The boss is getting me ready for another go one of these days. You gotta come see it. I'll have the office mail you a couple of ringside seats, the best in the house. You'll see me put the bee on that slap-happy bum, Milligan, again."

"Thanks, Slug," the professor answered. His voice sounded suspiciously hoarse. He didn't need to be told that Slug would never enter the ring again. "I certainly will be present at your next fight."

Abruptly, hurriedly, he changed the subject, turning to Hall.

"I—ah—lad, I hate to bring such a matter up at this time. But the truth is, I'm desperately in need of help, and I thought perhaps you—"

"Anything I can do," said Hall. He saw what was coming, and looked away.

Ross went on, "As I recall you in college, you had inherited a very thriving business from your father and were a very rich young man."

"That's right," said Hall sadly. "Rather, it was right. I finished college, went abroad for two years, and returned—" He shrugged. "I still have the business. If I can raise the capital to hold on for another six months, it will be my business again. But a certain financier is out to take it away from me. It's all a question of who can raise the most money first.

"But the upshot is, I don't have a dollar I don't need desperately. I'm sorry I can't help you. But if I come out ahead, six months from now you can have all the money you want for development of your experiments."

"It is I who should be sorry," Professor Ross answered. "I know you would help me if you could. But who is this man who is trying to take your business away from you?"

"You've already met him," Hall answered. "Raymond Garber."

"Ah—I see. Then that explains your enmity. It's too bad, lad. I hope you win out—"

"Say!" Slug Maroney interrupted. "I got an idea." The battered face was twisted into a grotesque frown of concentration. Thinking was hard for Slug; but Hall, his beloved boss, and Professor Ross, who had seen him lick Milligan, both needed help.

The frown burst into a grin. "From what I heard him say, the professor can make gold. Boss, why don't you get him to make you some gold? Then we could give this lug Garber the bum's rush. How about it, Professor? Will you make some gold for Nick?"

Ross looked at the beaming happy face above him. So far as Slug was concerned the whole problem was solved.

"I'm afraid it isn't as simple as that," Ross said hesitantly. "If I had time and money for research, there is the possibility that the process might be made profitable, but—"

Hall was looking at Maroney. "Slug," he said, "it's just possible that you've had an idea that's really important. Perhaps if you and I get together and helped Professor Ross, we might be able to do something. Anyhow it's well worth a look. Come on, Slug; let's you and me give Professor Ross a lift out to his laboratory."

As they got into Hall's car, which was parked at the curb, Raymond Garber came out of the Town Club. He saw them getting in the car. He looked

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down at the piece of metal he had in his hand. Ross had left it on his table. In the sunlight it glinted a bright yellow. Garber looked from it to the three men in the car.

"I wonder," he said thoughtfully, "if that old fool has really got something. This is gold. No doubt about that. But is the process profitable?"

The financier stood lost in thought. "I can't take a chance," he decided. "If that old fool has really got something and Hall gets hold of it, I'm licked. There's only one thing to do," he said decisively to himself. "I know the man to handle that end for me."

HE turned, walked back into the building, and entered the nearest phone booth. To the man at the other end of the wire he whispered cautious instructions.

None of the Hall trio saw Garber watch them leave. They had forgotten about him. There was gold ahead of them, laboratory gold. They were thinking about that.

CHAPTER II

Alchemist's Dream

PROFESSOR ROSS led them to a basement laboratory. There was only one door and it was locked and heavily barred. The windows at the top of the concrete walls were covered by heavy boards reinforced with iron bars. Even in the day, the only light was provided by shaded electric bulbs, which Ross switched on.

In the center of the room was a huddle of powerful electrical equipment. A dim, scarcely audible drone came from a transformer concealed somewhere.

"That's it," said Professor Ross happily. "It's operating now. You can hear the transformer humming. I left the current turned on so the production of gold would continue in my absence."

He immediately launched into an explanation of the way the apparatus functioned.

"I stumbled on to the method quite by accident. Quite frankly, I was using a cyclotron in an atom-smashing experiment, when I discovered, to my great surprise, that I was producing minute quantities of gold in the enclosed chamber where the electron stream was concentrated.

"That was several years ago, Nick. I immediately severed my connection with the university where you knew me and devoted full time to developing the process. But in spite of the research I have done, I must confess that I am still unable to understand what is happening. I can make gold, but I do not understand the process."

Nick Hall listened closely while the old scientist continued his explanation. But out of the corner of his eye, Hall watched Slug Maroney. Driving out here, Slug had been bubbling over with happiness. But the instant he entered the basement, a change had come over him. He quit laughing. Now he was poking around the basement, peering into corners, looking under tables. He seemed uneasy and alert. His whole manner indicated that he suspected the presence of danger. Now he came sidling up to Hall, his face masked in an uneasy frown.

"Boss," he whispered. "Do you hear anything?"

Hall shook his head. "A transformer hum, is all."

"No, it's not that. I hear that too, but I hear something else. It sounds like drums to me. Boss, do you hear drums beating a long way off?"

"Drums?" Hall echoed the word. A tiny chill of warning shot through him. He listened. He could hear nothing.

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"At times I have thought I heard the same sound," Professor Ross interposed. "But it always went away, and I assumed I was merely imagining things." The old scientist listened. "Yes, I can hear it now. The sound is very faint. It's dying away."

Then Nick Hall heard it. Drumbeats. Faint and far away. And going farther into some unguessed distance. *Thrrrumph-bong! Thrrrumph-bong! Thrrrumph-bong!* A kettle drum beat a tattoo and then a base note sobbed. The rhythm was perfectly kept. Kettle drum, base note. Kettle drum, base note. It wasn't a marching rhythm. It seemed to be marking time, as though somewhere a band of drummers were searching for something. There was a watchful note in it.

And it was utterly alien. The sound could only be described as the beating of drums. And yet no drum ever designed on Earth made a sound like that. There was a metallic touch to it, a growling *whirrr*.

The drums went into silence, seemed to fade away into an unknown void, an unguessed distance.

"It's gone now," said Slug uneasily.

"What was it?" Hall demanded.

ROSS shook his head. "I don't know. Perhaps this basement serves as a sounding board which picks up and magnifies some ordinary sound outside, such as the rumbling of a street car or an elevated train, until it resembles a drumbeat. It doesn't matter. It's happened before.

"Now, of course," he continued, turning back to his beloved equipment, "you will want to see with your own eyes how this gold is produced. I will turn off the current, open the chamber, and you will have a chance to examine the metal that has been synthesized since I left this morning."

The old scientist opened the main control switches. The transformer abruptly ceased humming. He opened the small metal chamber in which the gold was produced, bent over to peer within, fondly blinking near-sighted eyes as he looked down.

Abruptly he stood up. "My word!" he gasped. "My word!"

Amazed, incredulous astonishment was in his voice. His tone was that of a man suddenly confronted with the impossible.

"What is it?" Hall whispered tensely. Ross was in the way and he couldn't see.

"Look!" the old scientist whispered. He pointed a shaking finger at the metal chamber.

Hall bent over. He expected to see droplets of yellow metal; perhaps, since Ross had become so excited, a small lump of gold.

He saw the gold, all right. It was there. But it wasn't in the form of drops. Nor was it a lump.

It was in the form of a tiny statuette, an exquisitely carved golden figure about three inches high.

It was the image, perfect in every detail, of a golden girl! She was wearing a flowing coat caught in a clasp at her neck. A mass of hair tumbled down over her shoulders.

Hall caught his breath. It was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. And, at first glance, so perfectly was the statuette carved, that she seemed to be alive. She seemed to be a living, breathing human being made of gold, a tiny mannikin three inches high.

That was what Hall thought first—that she was alive. Then cold reason asserted itself and the flash of a grim suspicion crossed his mind.

"What kind of a game are you working?" he snapped. He had the fleeting thought that the old scientist was deliberately tricking him. Perhaps Ross

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had placed the statue in the chamber before he left, expecting it to be melted when he returned. Thus the scientist would be able to demonstrate that he had produced gold, and no one could prove it had come from a tiny mannikin he had previously placed in his machine.

Perhaps Ross was a faker; perhaps, desperate at the failure of his experiments, he had resorted to fraud.

"What are you trying to do—pull my leg?"

Hall was instantly sorry. Finding the tiny statue in the chamber of a machine designed to produce gold had surprised Professor Ross terribly. And the surprise was real. He wasn't acting. The truth was written on his face. He was surprised. He was shocked. And more, *he was already beginning to be afraid!*

"Lad, lad," Ross whispered. "I assure you that I would not stoop to trickery. I didn't place the statuette in there. It was done entirely without my knowledge."

The old man wasn't lying, Hall knew. And with that knowledge came the chill of a rising fear.

If Professor Ross hadn't placed the statuette where he had found it, who had? How had it gotten there?

HALL shivered. Cold winds blew up and down his spine. Husky, young, an expert amateur boxer, he wasn't afraid of anything that walked on two legs. But here was something that was beginning to frighten him.

"Is there another key to the door?" he asked. "Could anyone have entered here in your absence and brought that statuette?"

Ross shook his head. "I have the only key. The door was locked. And the windows are barred." He waved his hand toward the iron-studded planks which closed the windows. "No one can enter here without my permission."

"But someone did," Hall breathed.

"I don't think so," said the professor slowly. "I am beginning to suspect that we have run head-on into a bewildering mystery, for this reason if for no other."

He lifted the tiny statuette from the place where it rested, held it up in his hand.

"It weighs several pounds," Ross continued. "I do not for one second doubt that it is solid gold; which means, aside from the workmanship, that it has a value of between one and two thousand dollars for the metal alone. I cannot conceive of any human being willing to throw that much money away for the sake of mystifying me. As a joke, that is far too expensive.

"Also," Ross held the tiny figure up to the light, "the artisan who carved this was a master craftsman. It is unquestionably a museum piece. I venture to say that we have artists who could duplicate the workmanship, but not many of them. Perhaps not over four or five men in all known history could have carved this figure so exquisitely, which adds another angle to the mystery—"

"I hear them drums again," Slug Maroney interrupted.

The fighter had merely glanced at the statuette. It did not mean much to him. But after the drums had gone into silence the first time, his uneasiness persisted. He had continued looking slowly around the basement laboratory, as if he sensed the existence of danger but could not quite determine from what source it could be expected to materialize.

Now the sound of the drums had come again. Nick Hall tensed. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Maroney's fists come up. Professor Ross stopped speaking. There was silence in the

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room.

And in that silence was the sound of distant drums. No rumble of an elevated train, this; no clatter of a street car distorted until it sounded like drums.

Drums were throbbing. There was no mistaking the sound.

Thrrrumph-bong! Thrrrrumph-bong!

Coming closer, closer, closer! Coming from no recognizable source, moving through no known medium. An icy, chilling, throbbing sound. Moving closer. Throbbing louder, louder, louder.

Hall was holding his breath. Every muscle in his body was tense. His mind was in a turmoil. Where were those drums? They were loud enough to be right in the laboratory. What was happening? What incredible visitation was about to take place?

The sound grew in volume. Every pulsation was clear and distinct. There was something questioning about the notes. It was as though hidden drummers sought for something they had lost. Sought, and did not find the thing they were seeking.

For slowly the drums went into silence, went back into the unguessed distance from which the sound had come.

"WHAT on earth was that?" Hall whispered.

"I don't know," Professor Ross almost babbled the words. It was cool in the basement but the scientist was perspiring. He wiped beads of sweat from his forehead.

"It's uncanny, utterly weird," Ross stammered. "This is preposterous, but I got the impression we were hearing sounds that originated in another world." An involuntary tremor convulsed his body.

Hall stared at him. "Another world? What are you talking about?"

The old scientist shuddered. "Ignore it, lad. I don't know what I meant, or whether I meant anything. It just seemed to me that I was hearing drums beating in another world. But if there are other worlds, science has only hints of them, nothing definite, nothing that will even serve as a foundation for guesswork."

A sudden thought struck Hall. It startled him almost out of his wits.

What if those drums had been beating in another world? What if the statuette of the golden girl had come from some other universe? Professor Ross thought he had created gold artificially. What if he was mistaken? What if, instead of synthesizing gold, he had unknowingly stolen the metal from some other world?

Cold chills engulfed Nick Hall's body. Perspiration began to pop out all over him. Thoughts flashed through his mind. What mystery was hidden here? What incredible chain of events had possibly already been set in operation?

Brrong!

The sound whirled him around, his fists up, his senses on the alert.

It was only the ringing of the telephone. Professor Ross walked over to answer it. Hall relaxed. He didn't notice the conversation the scientist was holding over the wire.

Maroney came over to him. The fighter looked worried.

"I don't like it, boss. I don't like it a little bit. Let's me and you get t' hell out of here. Something's wrong, rotten. There's ghosts in this place."

"I don't like it either," Hall answered. "But I need money badly. Here may be a chance to get it."

He didn't add that, now his first fright was over, he was keenly curious. If he hadn't had the management of a large business thrust on him, Nick Hall

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would have become a scientist. He had seen something, the statuette of the golden girl, he had heard something, drums that might be beating in another world, that aroused all his latent scientific yearnings.

Professor Ross came back. "That was Garber on the phone," he said wryly. "He was under the impression that perhaps he had been a bit hasty, and he was trying to get back in my good graces. He apologized again. The truth is that he thinks I may be able to synthesize gold, and he doesn't want to miss a chance to gain a share of it. When I refused to accept his apology, he threatened me with legal action."

"What did you tell him?" Hall asked.

"I—ah—told him to go to hell," the scientist answered.

"Good for you," Hall grinned. "Now let's dig into your machine and see what we can find."

An hour later, he left the laboratory. Over Maroney's protests he left the fighter behind. He had a hunch that the professor might need a guard. Slug would be an excellent man for that job.

After a careful examination of the equipment in the basement, Hall was convinced that Professor Ross had not synthesized gold. But gold had unquestionably appeared in the machine.

WHERE had it come from? Where had the statuette come from? Neither the gold nor the statuette had been created within the machine. They had to come from somewhere.

But where—where—*where?* The question throbbed through his mind.

He went first to his office. An hour there cleared away the work which had accumulated. Then he went to three museums.

At each museum he displayed the statuette of the golden girl. Each time he showed it, the piece created a furore among the museum's staff. Archeologists examined it carefully, artists handled it lovingly. They pounded questions at Hall. Where had he obtained it? Who had carved it?

It was an extraordinary piece, the museums agreed. But they couldn't answer Hall's own questions. Insofar as their knowledge went—and their knowledge was extensive—nothing like it had ever been found on Earth before.

The home of Professor Ross, in which his basement laboratory was housed, was located on the near north side, on a quiet side street. Night had fallen when Hall returned. The street light in front of the house was out. It was the first indication he had that something was wrong.

As he raced into the house, he found, in the vestibule, a second sign that something was wrong.

It was a body. It was lying in the dark vestibule. He stumbled over it.

CHAPTER III

Garber Muscles In

NICK HALL struck a match. By the feeble light he saw the man he had stumbled over. It was Slug Maroney. There was a bruised spot on the fighter's forehead.

Hall dropped the match. "Slug! Slug!" he whispered. "Can you hear me? Are you badly hurt?"

The fighter stirred. "Is that you, boss?" he feebly whispered, shaking his head. He sat up. "Hell, boss," he wailed. "Somebody buzzed the front door and I went to let 'em in. There were three of 'em. The next thing I knew, I saw a blackjack whizzing toward me. Honest, I didn't have time to duck."

Three men had come to the house,

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the swift thought flashed through Hall's mind. Slug had let them in, and had been hit over the head for his pains. Why had these men come here? More, where were they now? Hall questioned the fighter, but Maroney didn't know.

"They asked for the professor," Slug said.

"So they asked for Professor Ross?" Hall thought grimly. He rose to his feet and, with Slug following, slipped silently through the deserted house and down the dark stairs to the entrance to the basement laboratory.

The door was closed. It was locked on the inside. Hall tried the knob. The door wouldn't open.

Voices came from the other side. "All right, Professor," heavy tones snarled. "If you think you can hold out on us and get away with it, you got another think coming. Give us the dope and give it to us straight!"

Hall needed only to hear that voice to know the speaker was a gangster, a member of the underworld.

"Cough up, Professor," another man said. "You don't want us to get rough, do you?"

"We sure know how to make mugs open up," a third voice added, in a rasping tone heavy with implied threat.

"Gentlemen," Hall heard Professor Ross answer. "You misunderstand the situation. . . ."

"We don't misunderstand nothin'," the first voice interrupted. "We know you know how to make gold. Well, you going to tell us how you do it, or are we going to have to help you talk?"

"Please. I assure you—"

"Aw, paste him one."

"He's stallin'."

The sharp sound of a blow came from beyond the door. Professor Ross tried to cry out. Another blow sounded.

"You willing to talk now?" one of the gangsters grated.

"Yes," the choked but spirited answer came. "I'm willing to talk."

"Okay, how do you make this gold?"

"You can go to hell!" the scientist said.

There was an instant of heavy silence. Then another blow sounded. And a voice snarled,

"Tie him to that chair. You, Joe, take off his shoe. We'll find out whether he'll talk or not."

Hall was sick at the thought of what was going to happen in that laboratory. Those three thugs were going to torture Professor Ross, burn his feet, force him to undergo the cruelest pain that one human being ever inflicted on another.

And there wasn't anything Hall could do to stop it. The door was too strong to be broken down. There was no other entrance.

"Open that door for me, boss," Maroney begged. "I want to tangle with those three mugs in a fair fight."

"I can't," Hall answered huskily. "But maybe we can scare 'em off."

A CHOKED, muffled scream came from inside the room. The torture had begun.

Hall pounded against the door. "Open up in there!" he shouted. "This is the police!"

In answer a slug came smashing through the door within inches of his head.

Maroney hurled his bulk against the barrier. It didn't give. Instead a spray of steel-jacketed bullets came whanging through the wood. The fighter ducked barely in time.

"Tie up the professor," a voice snarled. "Gag him. We'll shoot our way out of here and take him with us. Then we'll make him talk."

"They got guns," Maroney groaned. "When they come out, we can't stop 'em."

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Maroney was right, Hall knew. Unarmed, the two of them were no match for the three gangsters inside. The criminals would kidnap the scientist, use torture to force him to reveal the details of his invention.

And when they discovered he could not make gold, they would kill him out of hand.

Sounds of feverish activity came from inside the room as the criminals bound and gagged their helpless victim. Then—another sound came. Maroney, flattened against the wall, heard it first.

"Drums!" he gasped.

Thrrrumph-bong! Thrrrumph-bong! Thrrrumph-bong! The spine-chilling drumbeats throbbed from the laboratory.

An instant before there had been only the noise of the gangsters, the rasped orders of their leader, the scrape of their feet on the concrete. Human sounds, understandable noises. But now the hidden drums were beating. And swiftly growing louder.

"What is it, boss?" Maroney whispered. "What's happening in there?"

Nick Hall didn't try to answer. There was something about the beat of those drums that made his blood run cold, that froze him into inactivity. He crouched against the wall, listening.

The gangsters in the laboratory were suddenly silent. They, too, heard the drums beating. Then their leader was shouting frantically,

"Get to hell out of here! There's something damned wrong. Leave him here. We've got our own necks to think of!"

Hall heard them struggling to unlock the door. And he heard them fail to unlock it in time. For the drumbeats built to a crescendo. They were louder now than they had ever been before. There was no mistaking the fact—*the drums were now beating inside the laboratory!*

Simultaneously there came a sharp crackling sound. It resembled the spiteful snarl of a huge electric spark leaping across a gap. The ripping of a heavy piece of canvas, the tearing aside of a curtain, would have sounded something like this sharp crackling.

The gangsters quit trying to unlock the door. Hall heard them turn. He heard them cry out.

Guns roared. Answering the guns came the hiss of a heavy electrical discharge. A scream rent the air. As the hiss came, the scream was abruptly silenced.

Metal clattered on concrete. Hall could not see what was happening, but he recognized the metallic clatter as the noise made by guns falling from nerveless hands. A second later, he heard three bodies fall heavily to the floor.

SOMETHING had entered the laboratory and had destroyed the three gangsters. What he had heard could have no other meaning. But what had come into the lab?

Hall was sweating. Rivers of icy perspiration were pouring over his chilled body.

"Cripes, boss!" Maroney almost screamed. "What's going on in there?"

"Sh-h!" Hall hissed.

No sound came from the criminals. Professor Ross made no outcry. He was probably gagged. There was sudden silence in the laboratory, except for the weird throbbing of the drums. And the drumbeats had almost ceased now. The drums were in the background, watchfully waiting.

Steps slithered across the concrete of the other room. There was no conversation, no voices. Just the sound of feet slipping across the concrete. Many feet. Hurrying feet.

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It was the weirdest thing Hall had ever heard. Crouched in the darkness of the stairway, he could hear soft footsteps rushing all over the laboratory. But he could not hear a word of conversation.

"Boss, what if they open this door?" Maroney whispered.

Hall didn't answer. He had thought about that and he didn't know the answer. If the door were suddenly opened, what would he see in the room beyond? Electric chills surged through him at the thought. What incredible mystery lay beyond that door?

Five, possibly ten minutes, he and Maroney crouched there in the darkness, not daring to move, scarcely daring to breathe, listening to footsteps slithering on the cement floor. No attempt was made to open the door.

The drums boomed again. The sharp crashing as of an electric current crossing a gap came again. Slowly, softly, watchfully, the drumbeats seemed to recede into an unguessed distance.

"Whatever they were, they've gone," Hall gasped. "See if you can find something so we can beat down this door."

There was a furnace room adjoining the laboratory. Maroney went into it and returned with a heavy iron bar. They sent it crashing against the door. Eventually the stout planks yielded.

The door fell with a crash, revealing what lay within the laboratory. The lights were still burning. Everything in the room was visible.

Hall passed his hand before his eyes. Beside him he heard Maroney's gasp of surprise.

The laboratory was empty. The heavy huddle of equipment which Professor Ross had thought he had used to make gold was—gone. Oil stains on the cement marked where the apparatus had stood. But there wasn't a nut or a bolt left.

The whole machine was gone. The gangsters were gone. Professor Ross was gone.

Something had entered the laboratory, had overcome three armed thugs, and then had departed, taking four men and a mass of heavy equipment into—nothingness!

There was only one door into the room. Hall and Slug had been watching beside it. The walls were concrete, the windows were boarded over. Yet something had entered the room, entered through a door that did not exist. And had departed through the same strange gateway.

IN the oil smudges where the machine had rested on the floor were—footprints. Grotesque, misshapen splotches. Prints that were not made by shoes. Nor by bare feet, either. Hall shivered when he saw them, shivered with an icy, rising fear that he fought to control.

"Everything's gone, boss," Slug Maroney wailed. "I told you there was ghosts around this place. Now they've come and took everything away!"

The fighter's face was as white as a sheet. He was blinking his eyes and shaking his head. He was nervously clenching and unclenching his mighty fists.

"It wasn't ghosts," said Hall sharply.

"Then what was it, boss?" Slug begged. "For cripes' sake, tell me. I know I ain't smart, but this will drive me nuts."

"I don't know," Nick Hall answered, fighting his voice to keep a quaver out of it. "But Professor Ross said that science has hints that other worlds may exist. I think we've just had proof that they do exist. Creatures from another world came here and took everything away."

"But how would they do that?"

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"I can't even begin to guess."

Slug looked worried. "Why did they grab the professor and his machine?"

"Because he must have been threatening them in some way. I think that he was stealing gold unknowingly from this other world. The inhabitants discovered what was happening. They came after their gold. In order to protect themselves, they took the professor and his machine back to their world with them."

Hall reached into his pocket. "I wonder if they were also hunting for this," he muttered. "If they were, they sure didn't find it."

He held the statuette of the golden girl in his hand. He had taken it out of his pocket.

"I wonder if they will keep on looking until they find it?" he mused.

The thought chilled him. In some other world, were incredible creatures searching for the tiny statuette he held here in his hand? Would they keep on searching, until they found it? Was his life in danger as long as he retained possession of the statuette? Should he throw it away and thus find safety?

Hall couldn't throw it away. It was too beautiful. Also he was wondering —had somewhere a girl served as the model for this statuette? If she had, he wanted to meet that girl . . .

"So you thought you'd get away with it?" a heavy voice snarled from the stairs.

Hall whirled. Raymond Garber stood on the stairs. The financier came on into the room. He darted quick glances around the vacant laboratory.

"So you discovered that old fool really had something, after all. And knowing that I had already invested in his process, you thought you would cheat me out of my share of the profits by moving him and his equipment to some other place."

The accusation rocked Hall back on his heels. Garber thought that he and Slug had kidnaped Professor Ross!

"You can't get away with it," the financier snarled. "Remember, I have financed this invention and I have an interest in it. Unless you produce Professor Ross immediately, I'll have you arrested for kidnaping."

His eyes narrowed as he saw the golden statuette in Hall's hand. That the tiny mannikin was exquisite meant nothing to Garber. But the fact that it was obviously made out of gold meant everything to him.

"So I've got proof that Ross really made gold," Garber continued. "I'll take that right now as an advance on my share of the profits."

GARBER moved across the room. Nick Hall slipped the statuette back into his pocket.

"If you get it, you'll have to take it."

Garber's hand dived under his coat. It came out—with a gun. Hall saw the gun start to come up. He took one step forward and smashed his left full into Garber's jaw. His right followed fast behind in a terrific one-two punch.

Slug Maroney had taught his boss how to use his fists. Slug had done a good job of it.

Garber's head snapped back. The gun flew out of his hand. He staggered backward and collapsed against the wall. Hall kicked the gun into the corner.

"The next time you try to pull a gun on me," Hall said shortly, "I'll knock your damned head off!"

As he walked out of the building, Slug, following close behind him, wailed,

"Boss, can't I ever impress it on you? If anybody's going to get pasted, let *me* do it!"

"You'll probably get your chance," Hall answered grimly.

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Before they got into their car, they heard the drums sounding again. They were faint and far away, but there was no mistaking their meaning—the drums were hunting. And Hall knew what they were hunting for.

He gunned the motor in a wild getaway.

CHAPTER IV

Blackout

FIVE days later it happened.

For Nick Hall and for Slug Maroney they were anxious days. There was no indication of what had happened to Professor Ross. Hall had not reported his disappearance to the police. Such a story would get him a cell in the nearest psychopathic ward.

Raymond Garber had not renewed his threat to have Hall arrested. The financier seemed to have dropped out of sight. But Hall knew that shifty-eyed men were constantly trailing him. He suspected Garber had put them on his trail, hoping to be led to Professor Ross, but he was not certain. All he knew was that he was being followed. He did not particularly mind being trailed by gangsters. At their worst, they were human.

But the drums were not human. And the drums were also following him. How they trailed him he could not begin to guess. Possibly they were following the statuette.

At any hour of the day or night he might hear them. They would come out of an infinite distance and move closer and closer, like hounds on the scent of prey. Once he heard them in an office near the top of a tall building in Chicago's Loop. The elevator had carried him to safety.

Each night they had come, slipping softly nearer out of the silence.

Hall found he could run away from them. A hundred yards away from the spot where he first heard them, and the throbbing notes vanished.

But always they returned, always they found him again, until he and Slug Maroney were bleary-eyed from loss of sleep. Slug stuck with him.

"If they get you, boss, they gotta get me first," the fighter loyally proclaimed. "Me, I'm sticking."

Hall desperately wished for someone to talk to, someone who might give him a hint as to the true meaning of this incredible affair. Tentatively he brought up the subject to several of his friends. Their instantly raised eyebrows warned him to silence.

He sought to find a solution in books. What he found there, puzzled him more than ever.

The mythologies of all peoples were replete with hints of other worlds! The Norse legends spoke of nine worlds. Hindu mythology strongly suggested the existence of other worlds. And, in a final analysis, what was heaven but another world?

All literature was crammed with references to other states of being! Hints, suggestions, tips. Rarely were definite statements made. In fact, the authors seemed to be united in withholding the real information they possessed. It was as if the writers, knowing that most people would call them crack-brained fools, left tips for the discerning mind to detect.

Hall found references to people who had vanished. Charles Fort had collected a bookful of such instances. Men had vanished; other men had come from nowhere. Strange lights had been seen in the sky; strange objects had fallen out of the sky; rocks had floated up into the air and disappeared.

Most of the recorded instances could be charged off to hallucination. But

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could all of them be dismissed that way? Where there was so much smoke, surely there must be at least a little fire. Had the human race had before its eyes for centuries hints of other worlds, hints which it had persistently and blindly ignored? That was one of the questions Hall was facing.

Then it happened. He and Slug were in his office. Both were nervously alert for the coming of the drums. But the drumbeats did not come.

INSTEAD there came, suddenly, in the fleeting flash of a second, a sharp crackling sound, the same harsh crashing as of a heavy curtain being rent asunder that Hall had heard in the laboratory of Professor Ross, just before he had listened to the scurrying of feet beyond the locked lab door.

Midway between him and the window, a circle of light leaped into being. It was perhaps six inches in diameter and it looked like a round window. But unlike a window, it swiftly enlarged, grew bigger.

Hall, a startled exclamation leaping from his lips, was on his feet instantly. Two words roared through his mind—*"It's happening!"*

It happened almost too swiftly for the eye to follow. The circle of light swiftly grew in size. It was six feet tall. More and more it resembled a round window.

But it was a window that opened on another world!

He could see through it. But he could not see the familiar view of the office buildings of Chicago. Instead he saw —another city.

An unknown, unnamed city. Existing simultaneously with Chicago, existing in the same place that the Windy City existed, but in another world. A gleaming, futuristic city, with ramps circling tall buildings.

A puff of wind came through the window, bringing with it strange odors and fragrances.

"Cripes, boss!" Slug gasped. "It's caught up with us at last. Let's beat it."

"No," another voice said. "Do not —how you say—'beat it.' Remain. I wish to speak to you."

The voice came from beyond the circle that opened on the other world. And the speaker followed the voice.

Hall was paralyzed. The vision that came through the circle held him motionless. For the speaker was a girl. She was the living model from which the tiny golden statuette had been carved. Feature for feature, the statuette and the girl were identical.

She was the most stunningly beautiful girl Nick Hall had ever seen. She seemed to step directly from the window of a tall building, through the circle of glowing light, and into his office. Behind her, the circle remained open.

"Please—" she said.

She spoke English. Even more than her sudden appearance, that fact startled Hall. She knew his language, could speak it. True, she spoke it haltingly, her accent was bad, but she seemed to know at least a few English words.

He didn't have time to wonder how she had learned it. He didn't have a chance to wonder if possibly there was a hidden but constant flow of people from this world to her world. Her knowledge of his tongue was a minor miracle. The important fact was that she was here, in his office. And that she had seemed to come seeking him!

"Do not—be alarmed—"

"That's rather a large order," Hall gasped. "But I'll try."

She smiled a little at his words, and then looked quickly over her shoulder, at the window of glowing golden flame, as though something she had heard had

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alarmed her.

"Must be quick," she said, turning back. "Here. This for you." She thrust toward Hall a roll of blue paper that she carried in one hand.

He glanced at it and his startled eyes lanced upward to hers, seeking an explanation. She had handed him a roll of blueprints!

"Your friend—Rossi—made them. Very important you follow directions—in them. Bring help to Rossi and me."

"Rossi?" Hall answered, puzzled. Then his eyes widened. "Professor Ross! He's alive. He sent you to me." He almost shouted the words.

"Sh-h!" she warned him. "Do not speak so loud. The Wardens may hear." A shiver of fear shook her.

"WARDENS?" Nick Hall questioned, whispering now. "What are they?"

"They come with—drums," she answered. "If you hear drums, run very fast."

"You don't need to tell us *that*," Slug interposed.

"But what about you?" Hall queried. "Would they harm you?"

She shuddered. With a nod of her head she indicated the small instrument she held in her hand. Bright golden beams were lancing from it.

"This opens the veil," she explained. "I—how you say?—stole it from the armory of the Wardens. For that, they will kill me. For opening the veil, they will kill me. Their first law is—'Thou shall not open the veil between the worlds.' When I came to you, I broke two of their laws."

"But why?" Hall gasped.

"Because I must have help. Rossi said you would help me. He told me where I would find you. Will you help me? It is not for myself alone that I ask, but for others."

"Of course I'll help you. But what do you want me to do?"

"Rossi, he put everything there," she answered, gesturing toward the blueprints. "He say you will understand. But you must work quickly, if you are to help me—"

THRRUMPH-BONG!

Through the circular window that opened out on the other world came the sudden sound of a drumbeat. And this drum was not lost in the distance. It was near. Very near.

THRRRUMPH-BONG!

It sounded again. The girl flinched. She fingered the small instrument in her hand, apparently trying to close the veil. She was working desperately with it. But the veil didn't close. It remained open, probably because she was trying to work the device which closed it from the wrong world.

A man stepped into sight on the other side of the circular opening. Tall, haughty, narrow-faced, surprise glinted in his close-set eyes.

"Zorg!" the girl gasped. "Chief of Wardens!"

She cringed away from him. For an instant Zorg stared at her. Then he shot forth a stream of harsh gutturals. The girl flinched.

"No, no," she begged.

"What did he say?" Hall demanded.

The girl turned frightened eyes toward him. "Zorg say he always suspected me of—wanting to make friends with people beyond the veil. He say he has caught me with veil open—and that I know what the penalty will be. He will—how you say it?—have me killed."

"The hell he will!" Hall gritted. He started toward the figure standing beyond the opening that led into the other world.

"No!" the girl gasped. "Run! Get away! Your only chance!"

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"Not today," Hall answered. "I've been running long enough."

He started to leap through the circular window.

THRRRUMPH-BONG!

Another man stepped into view. He ranged himself beside Zorg. Then a third one appeared and took up his position on the other side of the Warden. All three of them were lifting strange instruments in their hands. These instruments were carried on cords hung around the necks of the Wardens.

THRRUMPH-BONG!

The heavy drumming note surged angrily. And it came from the instrument in Zorg's hand.

"Run!" the girl was screaming. "You do not understand. Run! It is your only chance."

NICK HALL hesitated. The tone of the girl's voice told him that she recognized danger. And the drumbeat that had sounded when Zorg lifted the instrument he carried held a deadly menace. He did not know what he was facing. He was willing to face danger, but he was not foolhardy enough to throw his life away needlessly and uselessly. He drew back.

Too late. He saw the cruel grin on the Warden's face, saw the instrument come up. The girl screamed.

A stream of golden light lanced from the instrument. It struck Hall. Instantly needles of flaming fire shot through his body. It was the most agonizing pain he had ever experienced. It combined the swift throb of pain from an aching tooth, the fierce agony of a broken bone, the torture of twisted, torn muscles, combined them all into a single blinding agony.

He tried to leap to the side. His muscles refused to obey his will. Something about the golden light seemed to hold him powerless. He could not move. And flashes of fire were leaping up into his brain. He felt himself falling.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Slug Maroney. The fighter had tried to leap to his side. One of the Wardens was playing a stream of flame over him.

The third had turned his instrument on the girl. She did not attempt to resist. Nor did she cry out. She stood and faced her attackers, and through the lines of torture on her face, defiance clearly showed, a defiance that made Hall's heart leap.

She had courage, that girl, the courage to face death and hurl defiance in its gruesome face. Above all other qualities, Nick Hall loved courage.

The last picture he had was of her fearlessly facing the golden flame. Then blackness swirled over him. He felt himself falling. He did not know when he hit.

CHAPTER V

In Durance Vile

FROM an infinite distance Nick Hall heard a voice calling to him.

"Nick, lad," the voice said. "Lad, lad . . ."

He tried to answer but his whole mind seemed disorganized. Globules of floating fire were still flashing before his eyes. His body was a single mass of pain.

He felt his mouth gently forced open. A liquid dribbled down his throat. He swallowed. Strength began to flow back to him. He opened his eyes. Professor Ross was bending over him.

"Where am I?" Hall whispered.

He did not recall everything that had happened. It all seemed a part of an incredible dream.

"I'm afraid we're in the Cro-Magnon equivalent of prison," the old scientist

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answered.

Hall sat up. Yellow sunlight slanting through iron bars met his eyes. Slug Maroney was sitting up also. The fighter blinked at him.

"Boss," he said, "it looks like we're in a pickle."

Then Hall's memory came back. The whole sequence of events flashed before him. Meeting Professor Ross in the Town Club . . . Raymond Garber's rough treatment of the old scientist . . . The gold that Ross thought he had made . . . It was all a part of a trail that led here. The only good thing about it was that Garber, at least, wasn't around.

Professor Ross tried to explain what had happened.

"You were right, Nick. I wasn't making gold. My equipment merely opened a small hole into this world. It so happened that this hole was in the treasure vaults of the Wardens. When the golden statuette slipped through into our world, they discovered it was missing. They began looking for it. They must have been terribly frightened when they found it had slipped through.

"They know of our world," the old scientist continued. "They originally came from it. They have a method of breaking through the interspace which separates the two worlds. In former centuries they must have gone back and forth between the two worlds rather frequently. But not any more. Rarely, if ever, do the Wardens return to our world. You see, they are scared of us, scared we will discover their existence.

"Possibly there aren't over a few millions of them. They know that if they are once discovered, the overpopulation of Earth will flow here. And they don't want that to happen.

"Therefore, when they learned that one of the scientists of our world had discovered a method of penetrating the interspace, they promptly came through and kidnaped that scientist and confiscated his equipment. If his disappearance created speculation on Earth, it would not matter. No one on Earth would know what had happened. Many men have disappeared in the past, and no one has known what became of them. That's why they kidnaped me," Ross finished.

"I already know about that. We were outside your door when it happened. But who are these people? Where did they come from?"

Ross sighed. "Their presence here solves one of the big puzzles of history —what happened to the Cro-Magnon race.* The Cro-Magnons developed in Europe. They were, physically, a strong, hardy people. Measurements of the skeletons found today show that they had a greater brain capacity than civilized man of the present.

"They developed tribal organization, learned how to make excellent flint weapons, and from all we know about them today, it looks as though they should have become the dominant human race. Instead they vanished. What became of them has been one of the most puzzling questions ethnologists have ever faced."

Nick Hall stared at the old scientist. He remembered fragments of the courses he had taken in college. Neanderthal man, the Piltdown man, the dawn man. But the Cro-Magnons had

*The Cro-Magnons are the mystery people of anthropology. They were perhaps the most intelligent of all ancient races, judging from skull measurements and brain capacity, and the mystery of their disappearance from the family tree of man has puzzled scientists greatly. It is possible that this advanced type of mankind was unable to cope with the rigors of a savage world, and thus was wiped out by animal contemporaries. But it is also possible that they underwent some other change, whether evolution, or an unknown migration, we cannot be certain.—Ed.

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been superior to all the early races. They had looked like sure shots to win out in the struggle for survival. But they hadn't won out. They had disappeared.

THEY had come here, to this world across the veil.

"But they were savages when they vanished," Hall protested. "They would not have known how to cross the interspace."

Ross nodded. "There are a few places on Earth where the veil is thin, where both men and animals may stumble into this strange world. The Cro-Magnons found such a place ten to fifteen thousand years ago, and the whole race came through. They were a stone-age people when they arrived here, but in the ten to fifteen thousand years that have passed, they have developed their sciences tremendously. From what I understand, most of their development has ended. Now not even the Wardens understand the operations of the instruments they use.

"When they first came through into this world, they were a rising race. They kept on rising. But several centuries ago they reached their peak. Now they are retrogressing, losing their civilization, going back toward savagery." The old scientist shook his head, and abruptly changed the subject.

"They are organized into two classes. The Wardens, whom you have seen, represent a degenerated priesthood. They are the rulers. The other class exists in slavery. There are a few thousand Wardens, and a few million slaves. Occasionally, when they have the chance, the Wardens raid Earth and increase their supply of slaves."

"And the girl whom you sent to me," Hall questioned. "Who is she?"

"Zelda?" Ross asked him.

"I don't know her name. I never had a chance to find out."

"She is a member of the ruling class. On Earth, we would call her a princess. She belongs to a small secret group which is attempting to oppose the Wardens. They advocate opening the veil between the two worlds. A few of the ruling class are intelligent enough to see that they are degenerating. They realize they need new blood, and that their science has ceased developing."

"What will they do to her for coming to our world for help?" Hall didn't want to ask that question.

Ross didn't want to answer it. Either he didn't know or he wouldn't talk.

"We've got to get out of here," said Hall grimly. "She risked her life for us and it's up to us to save her. What about the three gangsters who were in your laboratory when the Cro-Magnons appeared? Will they help us?"

"I'm afraid not, lad. You see—"

The answer was taken out of Ross's mouth. The door of the cell opened. The leader of the gangsters came in.

Slug Maroney looked at him. The fighter's hands knotted into fists.

"You're the mug who hit me over the bean wit' the blackjack," he challenged.

"Right you are," the gangster admitted. "You stood there like a sap and let me tap you one. But no hard feelings, pal. It was all in the line of business, you understand. No harm done. Let's shake and be friends, huh? Let bygones be bygones. I'm Pete Jordan."

Grinning, the gangster advanced toward Slug with hand outstretched. Hall could scarcely believe his eyes. This thug was trying to be friendly. And he seemed to have the run of the place. No guard had accompanied him.

Perhaps here was a chance to escape, Hall thought quickly.

MARONEY doubled up his fists. "You're not any friend of mine,"

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he snarled. "Pete, hell! Your name is 'rat'!"

He led with his left. Jordan ducked.

"Slug!" Hall yelled. "Stop it. Can't you see Jordan is trying to be friendly? He can help us get out of here."

"That's right," Jordan spoke quickly. "Let's be friends."

"You got this mug wrong, boss," Slug protested. "He's giving you the old come-on."

Maroney feinted. Jordan ducked again, and Maroney's right cross tapped him sharply on the jaw, sending him spinning backward.

Jordan didn't fall. He caught himself like a cat. Rage mottled his features.

"All right," he snarled. "Because you're white men, I talked Zorg into giving you a chance to get on the right side. But you wouldn't take it, so how do you like this, huh?"

A drumbeat sobbed through the room as he yanked one of the Warden's weapons from under his coat. Its round muzzle covered the fighter.*

"How'd you like a dose of this, huh? Just a taste, to see how it feels."

A drizzle of golden flame lanced from the muzzle. The weapon wasn't operating full blast or it would have seared the fighter into nothingness. The flame enveloped Slug.

Slowly, his face contorted with agony, Slug sank to the floor. Hall tensed himself to leap. Jordan swung the weapon toward him.

"You want some of it too, huh?"

A flick of the flame danced over Hall. He was instantly sick with pain. Jordan grinned at him. Then the gangster slid the weapon back under his coat.

"We're gonna organize this dump," he boasted. "These ginks here think they know something about how to run a place, but they don't understand the first principles of the business. They ain't even skimming the cream. We're gonna show 'em how we run things back in Chicago. Can you believe it—there ain't a single racket in this world. The bosses never thought of it."

He laughed harshly. "We're gonna fix all that. Zorg is plenty interested in our proposition. We can show him a hundred different ways that he never thought of where he can clean up. And," he ended, "I was gonna cut you guys in on it, but not any more."

He walked out of the cell. The heavy door clanged behind him.

"Not only do we have to fight the Wardens of the Cro-Magnons," Hall said huskily, "but the gangsters of Chicago as well."

"One day," Slug muttered, rising from the floor, "I'm going t' hand that mug a punch he won't ever forget."

"Before we can even think of doing anything," Professor Ross added, "we have to escape from this prison. And how on Earth are we going to do that?"

"Hist!" said a voice from the corner of the room.

CHAPTER VI

Trapped!

ONE of the blocks of stone of which the cell was constructed had been pushed aside. Peering out of the opening was what Nick Hall at first thought was a child. A second glance told him he was wrong.

"A dwarf," he whispered.

"Gosh!" Slug muttered. "A little man. Hi yah, buddy! You want to

* The guns were crude disintegrators, and the drumming note was similar to the explosion of a pistol, a sound that accompanied the discharge of the weapon. However, the drumming note could be produced without firing the disintegrator. The Wardens rarely had to use the guns. All they did was sound the drumbeat. In their own world, that was sufficient to frighten away anyone foolish enough to oppose them.—Ed.

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play games wit' us?"

"Shut up, you big ape," the dwarf answered, in a voice surprisingly bass to come from so small a creature. "Button up that big lip of yours before I sock you one on the chin."

Slug looked hopelessly bewildered. "Say, you want me to turn you over my knee and warm your bottom for you?"

"I'd like to see you try it, you big gorilla. I'll tie you into knots. I'll cut you to pieces. I'll mow you down!"

Maroney blinked at this defiance. The dwarf was waving his little fists. He was not over three feet tall.

"We don't fight with babies," Maroney snapped.

"Don't you call me a baby, you big hunk of cheese, or I'll carve you into goldfish food."

"Just a minute," Hall interposed. "Who are you? What do you want?"

The dwarf left off menacing Maroney. He bowed.

"Captain Rommey, sir, at your service. Once of the Great Amalgamated Circus, and the best little man who ever sat in a sideshow tent, if I say so myself."

It was Hall's turn to blink. "How did you get here?"

"You got me there, pal. I don't know. I went for a walk one night, out in the woods, and I saw a light and went toward it, and zingo! here I was. For years now, I've been Zorg's prize household pet—damn his eyes!"

"You don't seem to like Zorg," Slug suggested.

"I don't like anybody," the dwarf answered. "But I like Zorg even less than that. One of these days I'm going to cut him down to my size and work him over."

Maroney broke into a grin. "I'll help you on that job, pal."

"Well, I should say you ought to, you big tub of lard," Captain Rommey snorted. "At present, however, I suggest you get out of here." He gestured toward the opening through which he had entered. "I was sent to bring you. The biggest damned fracas you ever saw is going to break out around here. What I mean, there's going to be a fight, because Zorg insists on enforcing the law against the Princess Zelda. We thought you would want to be in on it."

"What's he trying to do to her?" Hall demanded.

"He's going to have her executed, for opening the veil. The only way she can escape being bumped off is to marry him. She says she wouldn't marry him if he was the last man left alive. And she's got a lot of friends. In consequence, hell is going to pop. If you want to be around when we take the lid off the fiery furnace, into that hole with you. It will lead you to the secret headquarters of the plotters."

"You came to the right place to get some recruits," Hall told him.

He went first into the hole. It was barely big enough for him. He had to squeeze to crawl through. But he made it. Professor Ross came next, then Maroney, then Captain Rommey brought up the rear.

Hall, in the lead, heard Slug swearing vigorously.

"Shut up," he hissed back. "Somebody might hear you."

"But, boss," Slug wailed, "you don't know what this damned dwarf did! I got stuck and he kicked me, right in the seat of the pants."

"If you get stuck again, I'll jab you with a pin," came Captain Rommey's voice. "Shove along, you big worm."

Hall repressed a chuckle. Captain Rommey might be a dwarf but he could get things done.

WHEN Captain Rommey finally conducted them to the headquar-

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ters of the plotters, a tall, lithe Cro-Magnon rose to greet them. He had the same haughty, imperial bearing as Zorg, but his mouth was sensitive and his eyes, back of their mask of perplexed fear, were kind. Hall liked him instantly.

"This is Hurlon," Captain Rommey said. He added, "Prince Hurlon. He is the brother of Princess Zelda."

The two men shook hands.

"From what Zelda told me, you're each meeting your future brother-in-law," the dwarf said mischievously.

Hurlon looked surprised. "What say?" he demanded.

Hall flushed painfully. "I assure you, Prince, that Captain Rommey spoke entirely without cause," he said embarrassedly. "I have barely met the princess—and I don't—she doesn't—I mean—"

"What do you mean?" Captain Rommey demanded. "Speak up."

Nick Hall did not know what to say. He had absolutely no knowledge of the etiquette prevailing in this Cro-Magnon world. If he even expressed admiration for Zelda, he might be making a serious blunder. If he said nothing, his silence might conceivably be cause for offense. His face turned brick red.

The dwarf observed him keenly. "The princess made a wise choice," he said. "Do you not agree, Prince Hurlon?"

Hurlon smiled. He spoke rapidly, in the Cro-Magnon language. The dwarf translated for him.

"He says he agrees," Captain Rommey grinned. "And you needn't be embarrassed. In this world, just as in our world, the women pick their men. You've been picked, and there's not much you can do about it."

"Perhaps I don't want to do anything about it," said Hall stoutly.

"Here," Hurlon interposed, "are plans for the revolt. First—rescue Zelda."

* * *

IT was a queerly assorted rescue party. A dwarf, a Cro-Magnon prince, a slap-happy prize fighter, and a youthful executive. Hall and Slug were dressed in the flowing garments of the Wardens. For weapons they had short swords and daggers.

"These palookas have never invented guns," Captain Rommey had explained. "They've got bows and arrows, swords, spears and that kind of junk. But no guns. However, they've got something worse than guns—the drumming death. Wish we had some of the drums, but Zorg only gives them to his own guards."

"We know about that," Hall had said. It seemed strange to him that a race could be so advanced in one respect and so retarded in another. The Cro-Magnons didn't have guns. But they did have a weapon far worse than anything ever invented on Earth.

Against the drumming death, Hurlon had provided each member of the party with a shield. These shields were new things, recently devised. They had been invented by a member of the revolutionary group, and the Wardens did not know that they existed.

"We've been saving up on these shields," Captain Rommey explained. "They'll be a big surprise to the Wardens—if they work. If they don't work, they'll be a big surprise to us!"

Zelda was held prisoner in the ornate temple palace. They were relying on the darkness and their garments to get them past the guards. Captain Rommey conducted them into the building by a circuitous route selected to avoid a chance meeting with a Warden. The dwarf, and Hurlon as well, were perfectly acquainted with the building. So familiar were they with the place that

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once inside, they instantly knew that something was wrong.

FRIGHTENED slaves were hurrying in every direction. Groups of Wardens were stalking down the corridors, all moving toward a central point.

"Something's up," Captain Rommey said. He pushed Hall and Slug into a hidden alcove. "You wait here. Prince Hurlon and I will scout around and see what's happening. What say, Prince? Does that go with you?"

Hurlon nodded. He was becoming more and more restless.

A few minutes later Captain Rommey and the prince hastily returned.

"They've discovered that you have escaped," the dwarf explained. "Zorg is worried. He's holding a meeting. He knows about the revolutionary group and he's afraid he has a rebellion on his hands. Those three gangsters are with him. They've talked him into doing something, but I couldn't find out what it is. They figure they're going to be attacked, and they're working out a surprise for us."

"We have a surprise for them," said Hurlon tersely, indicating the shields.

The rescue of Zelda came first. After that, the attack was scheduled to start. A timetable had been carefully worked out. Now the temple was being quietly surrounded by thousands of rebels, a handful of recalcitrant Wardens and their personal slaves. With surprise working heavily in their favor, they should be able to overwhelm Zorg and his crew before the latter knew what was happening.

Captain Rommey knew where the girl was held prisoner.

"There will probably be only a couple of guards in front of the door," he explained. "We'll walk up to 'em like we owned the joint, and since Prince Hurlon is a Warden they won't dare attack us without orders. Then that big gorilla," he indicated Slug, "will smack one of them, while you, Nick, put the bee on the other one. After that, we'll grab the princess and get the hell out of here. The attack will just be starting then, and we'll escape in the confusion."

It was a daring plan. Its very audacity was in its favor.

Twice passersby glanced sharply at the little group.

"Get your nose up in the air," Captain Rommey hissed. "If you act like you belonged here, they won't challenge you."

Hall adopted the haughty, supercilious stare of the ruling class.

They rounded a corner and saw before them the door of the chamber where Zelda was held prisoner. Captain Rommey stopped short.

"Where are the guards?" he whispered.

There were no sentries outside the door.

"Forward," Hurlon whispered impatiently.

Hall said nothing. But he sensed the uneasiness of the Cro-Magnon and the dwarf. And this absence of guards was perturbing. Had Zorg got wind of their attempt and had he removed Zelda to another prison? Hall gripped the hilt of his sword.

The little group moved forward. It was Captain Rommey who pushed open the door and looked startled because he found it unlocked.

"This is too easy," he said. "There's something wrong."

"Look inside," Hall demanded. "Is she in there?"

The dwarf peered into the room. "She's here, all right," his excited voice sounded. "She's sitting in a chair."

Zelda had not been taken to another hiding place. They had found her!

They surged into the room. As the

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dwarf had said, Zelda was sitting in a chair. She made no effort to greet them as they entered. Nick Hall saw why she didn't.

SHE was tied to the chair. Thin silken cords secured her ankles and her arms to the sides. And she was gagged.

"This is a trap!" Hall snarled. "They left her here so we could see her and come on in. She's the bait in a trap they have set for us!"

He whirled to face the door. Two Wardens were coming through it. Behind them, down the corridor, he glimpsed others.

Thrrrumph-bong!

The deadly note of the drumming death sounded. There was in the viciously throbbing pulsations, the sound of a gloating triumph.

CHAPTER VII

Rebellion

IN college Nick Hall had gone out for the fencing team. But college was years behind him and this sword he held in his hand was not the light, slender rapier of the fencing bouts. It was an edged, pointed weapon, designed for one purpose—to kill. And it was heavy.

Facing the sword was the drumming death. The instrument that produced the gleaming agony which would rip through a man's body was as light as a pistol.

As the mocking drum note sounded, golden flame poured from the weapon in the hands of the foremost Warden. There was a gloating grin on his thin features.

Hall jerked his shield in front of his body. The shield was a thin lattice of interlaced wires. It would not stop a bullet or the driving point of an arrow, nor even the fierce thrust of the point of a sword. It was not designed to stop that kind of weapon. Its interlacing wires, powered by a tiny battery in the center of the shield, carried a current flow designed to blanket out the electric discharge from the drumming death.

But would it function according to design?

He lifted the shield and the flashing flame lanced into it.

And the shield held! The flame did not come through it. Where it lapped around the edges and touched him, Hall felt twinges of agony, but not the surge of devastating pain that the full discharge produced.

The gloating grin on the face of the Warden wielding the weapon changed to a look of perturbed surprise. He glanced at the weapon, as if he thought it for some reason had failed to function. He brought it up again, roaring at full blast now.

At this rate of discharge the weapon would sear a man to nothingness. The look of triumph appeared again on the face of the Warden. It was still there when Hall's sword sliced it cleanly in two.

Reaching out over the edge of the shield, he had brought the clean blade down. It was not a fencing stroke. No dueling master would have recommended it. The edge of the sharp blade bit down through the Warden's skull, down through his face, wiping away forever his cruel grin of triumph.

The heavy drumming of his weapon died into silence. For a second he stood on his feet. Death had come to him, just as he had intended for death to come to this man who opposed him, but he didn't know it. He never learned what had happened. He died without knowing what hit him. He collapsed to the floor in a bloody heap.

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"Good man!" Hall heard Hurlon shout.

"That's the stuff, boss," Slug Maroney husked.

By now at least a half dozen other Wardens were in the room. Expecting no resistance, they had come surging through the door behind the first two.

The death of the first one confused them. For a second they stared stupidly at each other, not understanding what had happened. They had never heard of shields against the flame of the drumming death. Therefore shields were not possible. Instantly they seemed unanimously to agree that the weapon of their comrade had failed.

Their looks seemed to say, "Something went wrong with his drum-death. That is why he was killed. And because he was killed, we will exact a terrible vengeance from these renegades. We will let them dance in the flame of death. His weapon may have failed but ours will not."

They seemed very certain of their conclusion, and they seemed very pleased at the excuse his death had given them to torture and eventually destroy the four men who opposed them.

AS one man, the six lifted their weapons. The roar of the drums was as loud as thunder. The bright gleam of the flame lighted up the scene like one continuous lightning flash.

And the shields held! Hall, as he hurled himself toward the Wardens, sword ready to thrust and parry and thrust again, gave thanks to the Cro-Magnon who had invented those shields. Without them, they would have died instantly.

With them his little group could whip every Warden in this world, could clean out this degenerate ruling class, open the way for the hidden race again to climb upward, pierce the veil and permit the sciences of the two worlds to exchange information, the two peoples to intermingle. Earth and the world of the Cro-Magnons could each give the other much.

And all this was possible because a shield had been invented which turned aside the flames of the drumming death. That shield had also made possible the rescue of Zelda.

Nick Hall leaped forward. His sword point lanced out. He felt it pass through flesh as it drove into the throat of the nearest Warden. When he jerked it out, red blood streamed.

Flames of roaring death danced around him. And did not touch him.

Now the Wardens knew that the weapon of their comrade had not been at fault. They saw how the shields functioned. This disturbed them considerably. They began to draw back.

"Don't let these monkeys escape!" Captain Rommey yelled.

But the Wardens were not trying to escape. They had no chance to run. Others were coming through the door behind them, blocking the entrance.

They released the guns of the drumming death. Their hands flashed toward the hilts of their swords. The air was filled with gleaming blades.

The shields would not turn sword points. The fight had become a battle with naked blades, four men pitted against twice their number.

Nick Hall found himself fencing with a narrow-faced ugly Warden. The fellow's sword came down in a crashing blow intended to split him from head to toe. Hall caught it on his own blade, deflected it. The descending blade sliced into his left arm. He felt the pain, saw the red blood start to flow.

His own blade, instantly recovered after the parry, drove into his antagonist's heart.

Another one down. How many more

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were there to go?

The room seemed to be jammed with fighting men. Out of the corner of his eye Hall saw Hurlon parry a blow and thrust savagely in return.

Slug Maroney was having a battle. The fighter knew nothing of the art of swordsmanship. But he had two other assets: terrific strength and footwork. The knowledge of how to use his feet, gained in many a battle in the ring, stood him in good stead now. In fencing as in boxing, and in almost all other sports, as much depends on footwork as on anything else. And Slug had that. His feet danced over the floor. Ducking, feinting, leaping in and out, he seemed to be all over the room, his sword a smashing avalanche of red death.

Captain Rommey was yelling at the top of his bull voice,

"Give 'em hell, you big gorilla!"

"I'm giving 'em hell, you little shrimp!" Slug bellowed. "How about you paying for your keep your own self?"

BUT Captain Rommey was paying for his keep. He carried a full-length sword. It was taller than he was. He must have had tremendously strong arms, for he swung the heavy weapon like it was a willow wand in the hands of a magician.

"I'll mow you down!" he yelled at the Wardens. "I'll cut you into goldfish food. I'll carve my initials on your gizzard, you big bums!"

He was a small but exceedingly violent tornado of destruction. He seemed to bounce all over the floor. He was never still. And as he fought he yelled at the top of his voice.

"Come on and help yourself to a chunk of me, you overgrown monkeys! Many is the day I've been waiting to slice you into sandwich meat. I'll eat you without mustard. I'll tear you apart!"

Nick Hall sensed somebody fighting beside him before he saw who it was. He caught the flash of a sword, the bending of a willowy body. Then he saw who it was. Zelda!

When the Wardens first entered, Captain Rommey had cut her bonds. She had snatched a sword from a fallen Warden. And she certainly knew how to use it.

Hall's heart leaped at the sight of her fighting there beside him.

And they needed her help. The Wardens were pressing them backward. Hurlon was bleeding from a dozen wounds, Captain Rommey's bull voice was fading to a husky wheeze. Blood was pouring down over Hall's face from a cut in his scalp, almost blinding him. And their shields, instinctively used in an effort to parry the sword thrusts, were being cut to pieces.

There were only five of the Wardens left on their feet. But they saw what was happening to the shields. At a suddenly barked order, they quickly leaped backward, dropped their swords, and again grabbed the guns of the drumming death. Defenseless, the four men and the girl faced them.

Slug Maroney charged head-on, magnificently reckless. The fighter had dropped his sword. He had never known how to use the darned thing anyhow. His effective use of it had resulted from main strength and footwork, not from a knowledge of how to thrust and parry.

He turned now to a weapon that he did know how to use—his fists. When Slug was in his prime, no man on earth in his weight class had known more about the scientific use of nature's own weapons. Slug was no longer in his prime and he had put on weight, but his fists were still his favorite talking point.

He hit the first Warden square on

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the point of the chin. For an instant the Warden suddenly looked as if he had developed a hinge in his neck, so abruptly did his head fly back. Then he crashed backward into the other four Wardens, throwing them into confusion and momentarily preventing them from bringing their deadly weapons into action.

All this happened in an instant. The Wardens drew back, dropped their swords, reached for their guns, and Slug charged. So quickly did it happen that Nick Hall scarcely had time to realize what was going on. Then, as Slug drove a terrific right punch at the nearest Warden, Hall leaped in beside the fighter.

Slug flicked him a glance. "Get that one over there, boss," he panted.

"I got him, Slug," Hall exulted. He nailed the Warden Slug had indicated with a left to the stomach which doubled him over. Then Hall straightened him up with a right to the jaw. Which was all the treatment this particular villain needed. Only three were still left on their feet.

A HEAVY silence had fallen in the room, a silence broken only by the labored breathing of fighting men. For once Captain Rommey's bull voice was silent. Hurlon and Zelda were edging around the group, trying to bring their swords into play but not daring to strike for fear of hitting Hall or Slug.

Smack!

Crash!

Crack!

Three solid blows. Three Wardens slid ungracefully to the floor.

In the silence that followed the awed and admiring voice of Captain Rommey spoke.

"Well, you big gorilla, you are good for something, after all." The dwarf was calmly leaning on his sword. "Nice fight," he continued. "Any time, my money will go on you two boys—if I ever have any money."

"Aw, it wasn't anything," Slug panted. "These mugs thought their hands were only to eat with."

Hall was aware of a small, concerned voice speaking near him.

"You—are wounded."

It was Zelda, all concern. His face was a mass of blood, but he didn't care. They had won. *Won!* They had rescued Zelda. She was trying to wipe the blood away from his face. She glanced upward at him, and at the look in her eyes Hall—

"No time now for any lovey-dovey," Captain Rommey interrupted. "The big attack is due to start. And we've got to get out of here."

The words awakened Hall to the realization of their situation. Although they had overcome this group of Wardens, they were far from safety. They were in the heart of a building swarming with enemies. Any minute someone might stumble into this room. Or Zorg might send a messenger to find out what he had caught in his trap.

"Our shields won't help us now," Hall said. "We'll have to get along without them. They're ruined. But we can obtain a supply of the drum guns from these Wardens, and even if we don't have shields, we will at least be as well armed as the men we will have to face."

"Okay, boss," Slug answered. "We'll do the fighting. You just tell us how."

They swiftly stripped the weapons from their late adversaries. Hurlon showed them how the drum guns worked.

"You squeeze here—"

A shout coming from outside interrupted his explanation. Nick Hall leaped to the window, the others pressing around him.

In the darkness outside he could see

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a ring of lights advancing toward the castle. On the nearby buildings he could see men moving—archers taking up positions where they could shoot down. The archers could not use bow and arrow and handle a shield at the same time. In consequence, they could not openly attack.

But men armed with swords and protected by shields could attack, and were attacking. Great masses of the Cro-Magnon rebels were advancing. A body of men was moving to close each exit. Others, protected by shields in the hands of bearers ahead of them, were bringing battering rams toward the doors.

Each Cro-Magnon rebel had a shield and a sword. Fighting from behind their shields, they could drive straight into the flames lancing from the drumming guns, force the Wardens to use swords. And then the rebels would fight on even terms. By their very numbers they would smash the Wardens down, destroy them, free this Cro-Magnon world from the evil group that ruled it.

Hall's heart leaped at the sight of the swiftly advancing men.

"We'll mow 'em down!" Captain Rommey exulted.

"Our boys will splash 'em all over the place!" Slug grinned.

Prince Hurlon tried to find English words to express his thoughts.

"We—win," he brought out finally.

Zelda smiled and looked at Nick Hall. "And after we've won—"

Then it happened.

CHAPTER VIII

Menace Unknown

NICK HALL heard the sound without realizing what it meant. He did not even recognize it at first. Certainly it was not the throbbing of the drum guns. But what was it?

It came again, an ugly *rat-tat-tat*. Harshly, explosively metallic. *Rat-tat-tat-tat*.

The shouting of the attacking rebels, which had swelled to a mighty chorus, died into silence. Looking from the window, Hall saw confusion strike the advancing ranks. Eddies and swirls ran through them. They began milling about.

He could not see clearly what was happening. But it looked like some of the rebels were down.

Had their shields failed? Or had the Wardens made some change in the drum guns so that now the flame penetrated the shields?

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat—

Then Nick Hall recognized the sound. "It's a machine gun!" he gasped.

Prince Hurlon and Zelda did not understand. They had never heard of machine guns, they knew nothing of the most deadly defensive weapon yet invented by the human race.

Hall explained to them hurriedly.

"But where," Hurlon queried, perplexity on his face. "Where get? We have no—machine guns."

"From those three gangsters," Hall told him. "They must have argued Zorg into opening the veil. They went back to our world and got the guns."

"There's a couple more of them tommy guns opened up," Slug interrupted.

Three machine guns were crashing now, shaking the night with their staccato thunder.

Under the murderous hail of thugs, the attackers hesitated. Streams of bullets cut lanes through their massed ranks. A few tried to move forward, waving their swords. Hot lead smashed them down, left them writhing in agony

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on the ground.

It was pure slaughter. The shields would not stop machine gun bullets. Great gaps opened up in the ranks of the rebels. The ground was strewn with dead and dying men.

The rebels broke. Not even seasoned troops could stand up under the murderous fire being rained upon them. And to the rebels, machine guns were totally inexplicable. They were familiar with the guns of the drumming death. But this was something they had never heard of—a new form of death. They broke. Their panic became a rout. They fled in wild disorder. The attack, which was to have been a glorious victory, became an utter defeat.

"We have to get out of here and be damned fast about it," Hall snapped. "Captain Rommey, you know the way. Lead us out."

The blood was drying on Hall's face. Not one of the little group, with the exception of Zelda, but had been wounded. Limping like soldiers returning from battle, they began their retreat.

"We're not licked yet," said Hall grimly. "We'll get out of here and organize resistance. If those gangsters can bring machine guns into this world, we can bring armored cars and light artillery. I don't know where we'll get them, but we'll get them, if we have to steal them. They'll discover this is a game that two can play."

He wondered if he meant it. He knew how desperate their cause really was. He was talking largely to keep up the courage of the others.

PRINCE HURLON'S face was white and dazed. He looked bewildered and Hall, guessing what fate Zorg reserved for subjects who turned against him, knew what the Cro-Magnon was facing. Zelda was trembling. Captain Rommey's face was ashen. His confidence seemed to have completely deserted him. Only Slug Maroney tried to grin. It was a wry, twisted effort.

"Hell, boss, we're really in a pickle. But don't let it get you, boss," he hastily added, looking at Hall. "We'll whip these mugs yet. They haven't counted ten over us, not by a damned sight!"

Hall grinned back. "You said it, pal. When we get through with them, they'll think they've been turned loose in a cage full of tigers."

Captain Rommey guided them down the corridor along which they had come. They saw no one. The dwarf was taking every precaution.

They were armed with swords and with drum guns. They had discarded the now useless shields.

Nick Hall began to hope as they traversed corridor after corridor without meeting anyone. The attack seemed to have drawn all the defenders to positions where they could resist. The interior of the vast building was deserted.

"We're going to make it," Hall whispered to himself. "We're going to escape!"

"We're almost out," Captain Rommey whispered. "Another couple of turns."

Hope was showing on the dwarf's blood-caked face. Zelda looked less tense. Even Hurlon brightened. They were almost free—

"Okay, you can stop now," a snarling voice said from behind them.

They whirled. Pete Jordan, the gangster leader, stood in the corridor. He had come out of a door after they had passed. He held a tommy gun in his hands. It was pointed straight at them.

Hall tensed himself. He eyed the muzzle of the deadly weapon. The gangster read his half-formed thoughts.

"Don't do it, buddy," he said. "If you make a move, I'll sow you so full

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of slugs the undertaker will think you're a lead mine. Drop those guns. Let 'em slide to the floor. Quickly now!" he rasped.

Death showed in his mean eyes. The little group let their weapons slip from their hands. The clanking sounds as the drum guns and swords hit the floor were like echoes rising from lost hopes.

The rebellion had failed. They had failed. Zorg was everywhere victorious.

"That's better," Jordan said as the last weapon clattered to the floor. "Come along with me now. The boss will want to see you. He just sent me to see why you hadn't been brought in."

He herded them down the corridor.

"He is taking us to Zorg," Hurlon whispered. "Zorg will use the *tethen* on us." The Cro-Magnon shuddered. Hall did not know what *tethen* meant. It was not an English word.

They were marched into what was evidently the throne room of the Wardens of the Cro-Magnon race, Jordan with his gun following close behind them. Here Zorg awaited them.

But Zorg did not await them. Another person was here in this room. Surrounded by hard-faced men armed with tommy guns was—Raymond Garber!

Hall simply did not believe his eyes. What he saw was impossible. Garber could not be here.

GARBER'S eyes lit up with a savage gleam when he saw them.

"Nice work, Jordan," he snapped. "I'll see that you are rewarded for this."

"Thanks, boss," Jordan answered.

"How—how did you get here?" Hall gasped.

His look of complete bewilderment amused the financier.

"It's very simple. When my men discovered that your rebels were about to attack, they talked Zorg into opening the veil between the worlds. I was rather surprised at their sudden appearance, but they quickly explained everything to me. I immediately collected a group of men, secured the necessary arms, and came into this world."

"Your men?" Hall was still bewildered. "Are these gangsters your men?"

"They work for me," Garber replied harshly.

"But—" Hall's memory flashed back to the things he had heard in Professor Ross's laboratory. He indicated Jordan with a nod of his head.

"You sent this man out, to kidnap Ross. You ordered them to torture the old scientist."

Bitter disgust was in Hall's voice. He had known that Garber was bad. But he had not known the financier would stoop so low as to torture.

"I told them to use any means necessary to secure the information I desired," Garber flared. "I wasn't certain the old fool had anything, but if he could make gold, I wanted to know how he did it. And inasmuch as you are entirely within my power, I advise you to restrain your tongue—if you want to remain alive."

"Yeah," Hall snapped. "You're being played for a fool, Garber, and you don't know it. If you think you can take over here . . ."

Hall suddenly held his tongue. Zorg had brought Garber and his gangsters to the Cro-Magnon world, but unless he had misjudged the savage old Warden, Zorg would take adequate precautions to see that Garber did not seize control.

But there was no point in telling Garber about that. Let him find out for himself. When the financier discovered that Zorg had merely brought him and his men to this world to aid the Wardens in overcoming a rebellion, there would be a flareup—

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"I gather you're talking about Zorg," Garber broke into his thoughts.

Nick Hall didn't answer.

"Stand aside, boys," Garber ordered. "We'll let him see who the real boss is around here."

The gangsters obediently opened a pathway through their ranks, revealing something that Hall had not seen.

It was Zorg and several of the other Wardens. They were lying on the floor. All of them were securely bound and gagged.

"When we take over a place, we really take it over," Garber gloated. "If you were thinking that possibly Zorg and I would fall out, and thus give you a chance to escape, you're badly mistaken. I'm running this world now, and if there is one thing I know how to do, it's taking over new territory. We have all the weapons of the Wardens and we have machine guns besides. We can hold this place against an army."

He paused and Hall's heart sank. He knew Garber's ruthless thoroughness. Everything that stood in his way would be swept aside. There was wealth in this world, plenty of it; more than that, the secret of opening the veil was in the possession of the Wardens. If Garber secured that secret, he could prey at will on his own world. He could be king of two worlds, the Cro-Magnon world and Earth. He could be a dictator the like of which history had never known.

"You have *all* weapons?" Hurlon asked.

"All of them," Garber answered.

"Including the *tethen?*" The prince shivered as he used the word.

"*Tethen?* What's that?" Garber inquired.

"Nothing," Zelda hastily answered. "My brother does not understand your language."

When Hurlon had mentioned the *tethen* the bound Wardens had seemed to squirm.

GARBER appraised the girl. "Say, you're a looker," he said admiringly. "After we have everything fully under control, I'll be around to see you." He grinned at her in a way that made her draw back.

Garber turned to Jordan. "Lock them up in a room somewhere and set a guard over them."

"Okay, boss," the gangster nodded.

As they were herded out of the room, Nick Hall heard Garber order that the Wardens be taken away and confined.

The four of them were forced to enter a small windowless room.

"I'll be right outside with this tommy gun," Jordan said. "If you try to escape, I'll cut you to mincemeat."

The door clanged shut behind them.

"Cripes," said Slug Maroney sadly. "Zorg was bad enough. But I'd a dozen times rather mix with him than with Garber. That damned devil hasn't got a single human feeling in him."

Hall did not notice what Slug said. He was wondering what *tethen* was. He had noticed how Zelda had hastily steered Garber away from the subject. He remembered how Prince Hurlon had showed such abject fear even when he mentioned the word.

What was the *tethen?*

CHAPTER IX

Disintegration

BEFORE Nick Hall could question Zelda about the *tethen,* the door was opened and Professor Ross was thrust in.

"I had hoped you had escaped," the old scientist said when he saw them.

In response to their questions he told them what was happening outside.

"The rebels are completely disor-

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ganized. They know nothing about machine guns and are terribly afraid of them. I tried to show them what to do, but even the leaders have fled."

"That is what is wrong with my people," Zelda said. "They have no spirit. They have been beaten so long, held in subjugation so long, that—how you say it?—"

"That they have forgotten the meaning of freedom?" Hall supplied.

"Yes. That is it. We have been working for years trying to get them to revolt. They would not. They were afraid. Even when we discovered the shields that stopped the flame of the drumming death, they did not have the courage to attack. The drumming death would not touch them, but there was still the *tethen*. Only when we learned that the *tethen* had been lost, were we able to convince them they should rebel openly."

"What is the *tethen?*" Hall asked.

Zelda's tense face whitened. She shook her head. She didn't want to talk about it, until he insisted.

"I have never seen it. No one but Zorg, the leader of the Wardens, ever sees it."

"But what is it? What does it do? What is it like?"

"It is—most beautiful," Prince Hurlon said.

"And most terrible," Zelda added. "It is a weapon. It destroys—anything."

"Anything?"

"Yes. Anything the one who possesses it wishes to destroy, it destroys. Metal, wood, stone—it tears them to dust. It works quickly, like that." She snapped her fingers. "One instant there is a man. The next instant the man is silvery dust floating in the air."

A convulsive tremor shook her. "I was to have been executed with the *tethen*, if I refused Zorg. It is the way all who oppose the Wardens are destroyed."

Silence ran through the little group. Slug stirred uneasily. Captain Rommey looked at the floor.

"But they lost it, somehow," Zelda said. "That is why I was not executed immediately."

"Possibly it is some form of a disintegrator," Professor Ross diagnosed.

Hall nodded. The guns of the drumming death were disintegrators when operated at full power. Probably the *tethen* was a further development of the same principle.

"My great—how you say it?—great-great-grandfather invented it," Zelda continued. "The Cro-Magnons had the drum guns even then. He improved on them. But, when he learned how terrible a weapon he had invented, he only made one *tethen*. He was the last of the great scientists of my race. No one else has ever learned how to make the *tethen*.

"But the one he made was stolen from him and the thief used it to seize complete power. Since then it has come down to each Chief Warden. Now Zorg has it. Or did have it until he lost it. I do not think he has found it, but we know he has searched everywhere for it."

"He has that," Captain Rommey interrupted. "He turned the treasure vaults inside out looking for it."

"But how did he lose it?" Nick Hall questioned. "Was it stolen?"

"Nobody knows," the dwarf gloomily answered.

"But surely a weapon as big as it must be could not be misplaced?"

"It is not big," Zelda said. "It is very small."

"SMALL!" Hall echoed. An electric thrill shot through him. "Say, what does this thing look like, anyhow?"

"I told you my great-great-great-

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grandfather invented it. When he found how deadly it was, he knew he should destroy it. But it was a great scientific triumph and he could not bring himself to destroy it. So he had a very famous artist use my great-great-great-grandmother as a model and carve a tiny golden statuette—"

"What?" Nick Hall shouted. "Does it look like you?"

"I do not know," Zelda answered. "It is said I look like my great— What are you doing?"

Hall was digging into the pocket of the cloak he wore. When he had changed to Cro-Magnon clothes, he had transferred an object from the suit he had worn when he entered this world to the pocket of the cloak. He had not shown that object to anyone in the Cro-Magnon world, for two reasons: because he had almost forgotten about it, and because men tend to keep hidden anything to which they attach a sentimental value.

Now he pulled from his pocket the tiny golden statuette which Professor Ross had found in the chamber of his gold-making machine.

"Is this it?" he demanded, holding it up. "Is this the *tethen?*"

Zelda and Hurlon shrank back. "Yes," Zelda whispered. "Yes. That is it."

"No wonder the Wardens raided your laboratory, Professor Ross, to try to recover it," Hall grated. "No wonder they followed me while I had it. We thought we had merely brought into our world a tiny statue. We didn't know that your machine was focused on the heart of their treasure vaults, that we had accidentally stolen the most deadly weapon they possessed."

The golden figure was more than a statuette. It was, if Zelda and Hurlon were right, the hiding place of the most tremendous weapon the Cro-Magnon race had ever devised.

"Your grandfather hid the *tethen* in a place where he thought no one would ever find it, in a tiny statue of his wife!" Nick Hall exulted. "How does it work?" He waved the figure in the air.

Hurlon and Zelda drew back. Zelda was trembling and Hurlon's face had changed to a slate-gray color.

"Be careful how you handle that," Zelda begged. "It is dangerous, terribly dangerous. Please, be careful. . ."

Hall cradled it carefully in his hands. An electric tension seemed to surge through the little group. Now, for the first time, they dared to hope. Now they had a chance to fight!

"We'll mow 'em down," Captain Rommey chirped up. From the way he looked at the tiny statue, it was evident that he had heard of it and was aware of its powers.

Professor Ross examined the precious figure. "I don't understand it at all," he said dubiously. "It must operate on some principle of which Earth science knows nothing. Possibly, if it does what Hurlon and Zelda says it will, it in some manner distorts or loosens the atomic bonds within the molecule. The fact that it is so small means nothing. It doesn't take much T.N.T. to do a lot of damage, for example."

"But how does it work?" Hall demanded, taking the statue away from the scientist.

Zelda showed him. "You press here and here," she gingerly indicated two places. "The force that is released is not visible but it flows from the eyes of the statue. It does not reach very far, but anything in its way is instantly stricken. . ."

"What's all this noise about?" a heavy voice demanded.

JORDAN stood in the doorway.

He saw the tiny statuette in Hall's

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hand. "Holding out, eh? Give me that thing. It looks like it would fetch plenty bucks in a pawn shop."

"No," Hall answered. "No, you don't understand—"

"I said to give it to me," the gangster demanded. He lifted the tommy gun. "If you think I'm going to take any lip off of you—"

"Drop that gun!" Hall commanded. "You don't know what you're facing."

"I sure as hell know what *you're* facing!" the gangster snarled. "You can't bluff me. This is your last chance. Give me that thing or I'll turn the heat on you."

Hall was not certain that he knew how to work the *tethen.* But if he yielded it to Jordan, their last chance of escape went glimmering. And the gangster, knowing nothing about the *tethen,* did not realize that he was covered. He was not likely to believe any explanation.

He lifted the tommy gun. Death was in his eyes.

Hall pointed the eyes of the tiny statuette at him. He pressed the spots Zelda had indicated.

And it seemed to him that nothing happened. There was an instant in which time stood still. He heard Zelda and Hurlon gasp. The tiny statuette was suddenly cold in his hands. But no beams of light lanced from the eyes, as he had halfway expected.

But some tremendous force seemed to have been loosed. Jordan never got the tommy gun up. The gangster seemed to freeze.

Hall was aware of a tiny tinkling sound, like thousands of microscopic silver bells ringing in a sudden surging chime. It was so faint that he could scarcely hear it. There was something in it vaguely reminiscent of the throbbing notes of the drum guns, but infinitely softer, farther away, and somehow more threatening, more deadly. The drum guns had blustered about death. The *tethen* whispered, but the whisper sounded infinitely more deadly than the booming of the drums.

For an instant the gangster froze. A scream gurgled at his lips. It was choked off. He seemed to begin to spin. There was no movement of his body, but Hall got the impression that every atom in Jordan's physical being was suddenly spinning free of its axis. Little flecks of light began to dance away from him. Suddenly the lights danced faster. The lights looked like thousands of microscopic Fourth of July sparklers. They flared out from Jordan's body. They spurted outward.

The gangster dissolved into millions of tiny twinkling lights. They began to settle to the floor as a thin gray dust.

*The gangster was gone!**

It was a full minute later before Hall heard himself saying huskily:

"All right. Let's get Garber. We'll give him a chance to surrender, but if he doesn't take it—"

It was an awed, frightened group that followed him as he cautiously approached the room where Garber waited.

CHAPTER X

Crime's Last Stand

RAYMOND GARBER was bending over a pile of loot on a table. Already his men had begun to sack the

*Doubtless the tiny statuette of Zelda contained a force that generated a disturbance in the atomic cohesion of any object upon which it was turned. Thus, when Hall turned the image upon the gangster, it set up an unstable state of atomic magnetism in his body and this spread by contagion until all the atoms of his body shook themselves apart and became simply free atoms that dissipated themselves in the atmosphere. Because of the attendant sparks, it is logical to believe that energy released was expended electrically into the ground.—Ed.

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temple of the Cro-Magnons. They were bringing their finds here. Gold, jewels, bits of statuary—anything that seemed to have value.

Nick Hall came into the room. The others crowded behind him. He was in before Garber knew he was there.

Hall held the *tethen* in his hands. But he did not press the two spots that served to release its hellish energies. He had seen one man die under its influence. He never wanted to see another, not even Garber.

"Stick 'em up!" he grated. "I've got you covered, every one of you. Get your hands in the air!"

There were four gangsters standing beside Garber. They froze. Not turning their heads, they let their guns slide to the floor. They were criminals and they knew from the tone of Hall's voice to obey orders.

Hall breathed easier. He was not going to have to kill them, after all.

But Garber whirled. His eyes opened in startled surprise when he saw his enemy. The financier was holding in his hand a tiny golden ball that he had picked from the loot on the table. He did not drop it.

His eyes narrowed when he saw that Nick Hall held only a tiny statuette in his hands. His reaction was typical.

"It's a bluff!" he shrilled. "Grab those guns and blast these fools down."

His four men whirled about. They saw Hall standing there. They had thought from his voice that he was holding a gun on them. But they saw no gun. They saw no weapon of any kind.

"Don't do it!" Hall ordered harshly. "I'm not bluffing. I don't want to have to kill you, but if you reach for those guns, I'll blow you apart."

He was begging them to save their own lives. He didn't want to kill them. They were tools in Garber's hands, evil tools, but he did not want to be their judge, jury and executioner.

They thought he was bluffing. They grabbed for the guns they had dropped.

Hall sobbed aloud, "You fools—" and surged.

He turned the *tethen* on them. Again the little statuette grew suddenly cold in his hand as its tremendous energy lashed out. In some strange reversal of the ordinary process, where the release of energy is attended by heat, the *tethen* grew cold instead. The tiny silver bells whispered urgently of death.

And death came. It came to the four men in the winking of an eyelash. Garber, standing to one side, was not in the beam of invisible energy. But the four gangsters were in a group and the *tethen* covered them. Little motes of light danced from their bodies, danced and swirled while the silver bells chimed and surged.

Gleaming swirls of dust drifted to the floor. The four men were gone.

Nick Hall wiped the sweat from his face. He turned to Garber.

"Now will you surrender? You've seen—"

Garber's heavy face had gone white as paper as he saw his four men die. But as Hall turned toward him, his hand dived under his coat. He had a gun there.

Garber would not surrender. He would face death rather than see his plans fall through.

The gun appeared in his hand.

"Don't!" Hall shouted.

GARBER pointed the gun. Nick Hall turned the *tethen* on him.

And nothing happened! The little statuette grew cold, the silver bells chimed, but gleaming motes did not dance from Garber's body.

"In his hand!" Zelda hissed. "That golden ball. Against one who holds it, the *tethen* is powerless."

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Garber held a golden ball in his right hand. It was part of the loot his men had collected. In all probability he did not know what it was. But it was a counter-agent provided by Zelda's far-removed grandfather against the power of the weapon he had created.

And Garber had it in his hand. The force of the *tethen* would not touch him.

"Oh, Lord!" Hall groaned. "He's got a gun and I have nothing."

Garber's face lighted with fiendish triumph. He pressed the trigger. The gun exploded. Hall felt a red-hot poker of pain smash into his left shoulder. He leaped—straight at Garber.

Every bit of strength that remained in him, he put in a single driving blow. He could not use his left arm. But he still had his right fist. Slug Maroney would not have approved of him leading with his right, but he had no choice.

His knuckles landed flush on the point of Garber's jaw. The financier's head snapped back. He reeled away, fighting to regain his balance. But he had been hit too hard. His legs turned to rubber. He sagged to the floor—out.

Nick Hall did not know what happened after that. Suddenly he found himself sitting on the floor. The others were crowding around him.

"You're wounded," Zelda was saying anxiously.

"Boy, did you bust him one, boss!" Slug was exulting happily. "I never even hit Maxie Rosenbloom that hard."

Captain Rommey was jumping up and down. His bull-like bellow was shaking the whole building. Professor Ross was grinning. Even Prince Hurlon was smiling.

Nick Hall scarcely noticed them. Lying on the floor where he had dropped it was the tiny golden statuette, the *tethen*. He reached forward and picked it up. His face was very grim.

"We'll finish this business now," he husked.

He turned toward Garber. He lined up the *tethen*.

His face grew gray with strain. Garber, alive, was a menace, and he knew it. Garber was not dead. He was merely knocked unconscious. He would revive.

Around him the little group grew suddenly tense. They had won, they were victorious, but their cries of victory were quickly hushed.

Hall tried to push the controls of the *tethen*. Seconds ticked away. He sighed. He let the little statuette go limp in his hand.

"I can't do it," he whispered. "I simply can't destroy a defenseless man."

"Good boy," Professor Ross approved. "I knew you couldn't — but golly, you had me worried for a moment!"

Zelda's eyes were brimming with tears as she smiled. The little group clustered around Nick Hall...

Zorg found them that way. The Warden chief had managed to escape. He did not know that Garber had been whipped. He was looking for vengeance.

His eyes gleamed viciously when he saw them. He did not have a drum gun. But he had something else, a curious little gadget. He pointed it at them.

Nick Hall saw him. There was a look of gloating triumph on the Warden's face. Hall did not have time to bring the *tethen* to bear. All he could do was throw it.

Simultaneously Zorg pressed his weapon into action. A haze of soft golden light flowed from it.

The next thing Hall knew he was falling. He seemed to fall through a veil that covered a window. The others seemed to be falling around him. He caught one last glimpse through the window that had opened. He saw the statuette strike Zorg. A tremendous ex-

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plosion followed. The window flicked shut.

He was still falling. He hit with a thud that knocked him senseless.

WHEN he regained consciousness a crowd was around him. A man was bending over him.

"Are you hurt bad?" the man asked.

"Where'd he come from?" another voice asked.

"They looked to me like they fell out of the sky," someone answered.

"I guess they must have fallen out of a window," a fourth voice decided.

"Society swells," a fifth person added. "On a masquerade party. Look at them clothes."

Nick Hall lurched to his feet and stared wildly around him. He was in Chicago. He was in the Windy City. He was home! *Home!*

Zelda came through the crowd. "Are you—all right?" she whispered. There was a purpling bruise on her forehead.

Hall nodded. "Where are the others?"

Hurlon, gazing apprehensively at the gaping crowd which had gathered, came toward them.

"It seems," he said slowly, "we are in your world now. I hope you treat us better than we treated you."

"Don't worry about that," Hall told him, beginning to collect his senses. "Just don't worry about that at all."

"Boy! Back home! And does this burg look good to me," a heavy voice said. It was Slug Maroney. The fighter was sitting on the pavement. He grinned up at Hall and got to his feet.

Professor Ross came toward them. The old scientist was holding his head.

"What—what happened?"

"Zorg must have escaped after Garber had him tied up. When he found us, he had one of the devices the Wardens use to open the veil. He kicked us back into our own world," Hall explained.

"But what about Garber?" Slug anxiously inquired. "I don't see him anywhere."

"Garber didn't get through," Hall answered quietly.

"But maybe that means he'll get together with Zorg," Slug continued, frowning.

"I don't think so. I threw the *tethen* at Zorg. It seemed to explode when it struck him. To be as powerful as it was, it must have contained a tremendous store of some unknown kind of energy. When it exploded, it must have destroyed both Zorg and Garber. But if Garber is still alive, I think we can safely leave him to the tender mercies of the Wardens. They have a little score to settle with him. No, I don't think anybody will ever need to worry about Raymond Garber again."

Around them the gaping crowd listened.

"They must be nuts," a voice said.

"Yeah, that's it. They're from a nuthouse."

Nick Hall heard them. He said nothing. If the onlookers wanted to think they were crazy, so much the better. He looked at Zelda. She smiled, and swayed toward him.

"You can save the lovey-dovey until you get home," a bass voice rumbled.

They looked around. It was Captain Rommey. The dwarf was grinning happily at them.

"That's a good idea," Hall said. "You'll all come home with me?"

As he started to call a taxi, a cop came pushing his way through the crowd.

"Get moving here," he ordered. "What's the big idea, jamming up the street like this? Get moving, I said."

"You big palooka, you heard what the officer said," Captain Rommey snarled at Slug. "Get moving along."

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fantastic

AN AMAZING ARTICLE "HOW I FOUND LOST ATLANTIS" WAS PUBLISHED BY THE NEW YORK AMERICAN IN THE ISSUE of OCTOBER 12, 1912 - WRITTEN BY DR. PAUL SCHLIEMANN. BY FOLLOWING HIS DEAD GRANDFATHER'S INSTRUCTIONS, DR. SCHLIEMANN CLAIMED TO HAVE MADE THIS REMARKABLE DISCOVERY.

A FEW DAYS BEFORE PROFESSOR HEINRICH SCHLIEMANN'S DEATH HE GAVE A SEALED ENVELOPE TO ONE OF HIS CLOSEST FRIENDS

Professor HEINRICH SCHLIEMANN.

FAMOUS GERMAN **ARCHEOLOGIST** WHO DISCOVERED THE SITES OF **TROY** *and* **MYCENAE.** HE WAS THE GRANDFATHER OF DR. PAUL SCHLIEMANN, ORIGINATOR OF THE **ATLANTIS HOAX.**

DR. PAUL SCHLIEMANN

WHOSE CLAIM TO THE **DISCOVERY** OF THE **LOST CONTINENT OF ATLANTIS** WAS MADE EFFECTIVE MAINLY BECAUSE OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS FAMILY NAME, AND HIS GRANDFATHER'S UNIMPEACHABLE RECORD.

ALEXANDER BESSMERTNY -

WHO AFTER CONFERRING WITH MANY OTHER NOTED **ARCHEOLOGISTS** ON THE PUBLISHED ARTICLE OF DR. PAUL SCHLIEMANN WAS FINALLY ABLE TO PROVE IT AN **UNTRUE FABRICATION . .**

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hoaxes

BY WILLY LEY

There have been many stories of Atlantis, but the most convincing of all was the death-bed hoax of Dr. Paul Schliemann, who even in death, carried out his trickery

THE banker Abraham Mendelssohn has been credited with the saying that he spent much of his life in accepting with gracefulness the difficult feat of being son and father of famous men. He was the son of the then famous philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn, and the father of the still famous composer, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy.

It seems that Abraham Mendelssohn did manage to bear that fortunate fate gracefully. At any event, it is not known that he ever tried to write philosophical books or to compose symphonies. But there are other sons of famous men who did not carry the burden so well. Many of them tried to follow in their fathers' footsteps, usually with poor results.

In one notable case, however, the burden of bearing an illustrious name produced results that were not only poor but an outright hoax of almost unsurpassed impudence. And that hoax was effective mainly on account of the famous name attached to it, the name of Schliemann.

Dr. Paul Schliemann, grandson of the famous German archeologist, Heinrich Schliemann, who discovered the sites of Troy and of Mycenae, published in the "New York American" (issue of Oct. 20, 1912) a long article with the assertive title:

"How I found lost Atlantis, The Source of all Civilization."

Schliemann did not claim, in that article, that he had actually found the site of Atlantis somewhere, say in southern Spain or in North Africa, as other explorers did. He only asserted that he had discovered definite proof that Atlantis once existed, as the "classical" Lost Continent in the Atlantic Ocean. And he modestly said that the revelation was not really his own but that his grandfather, the discoverer of Troy, had made it. He only demanded credit for having carried out his grandfather's instructions to the letter.

"A few days," he wrote, "before my grandfather, Dr. Heinrich Schliemann, passed away at Naples, Italy, in 1890, he gave a heavy sealed envelope to one of his closest friends. This envelope was marked: 'To be opened only by a member of my own family, if he pledges himself to devote all life to the work sketched herein.'

"Only one hour before his death he asked for paper and pencil and wrote with trembling hands: 'Secret addition to the contents of the sealed envelope: Break the owl-headed vase. Study its contents. They refer to Atlantis. Excavate East of the ruins of the Temple of Sais and among the tombs in Chacuna Valley. Important! You'll find proof of my theories. Darkness is coming fast—farewell!'

"He then ordered that this message also be delivered to his friend, who deposited it in the vaults of a French banking firm. After I had studied for several years in Russia, Germany and the near Orient I decided to continue the work begun by my famous grandsire.

"In 1906 I gave the pledge and broke the seals of the letter. It contained numerous photographs and documents. The first of them was marked: 'Whoever opens this has to pledge himself to finish the work I had to leave unfinished. . . . I deposited a sum of money that will be sufficient to finish the work in a French bank. The money is at the disposal of the person that shows the enclosed receipt.'"

Dr. Paul Schliemann then really went to work—or so he said. He located the large "owl-headed vase" and broke it. It contained another sealed envelope and a number of objects made of metal. One of them was a square piece of silvery metal, inscribed:

"Issued in the Temple of Transparent Walls," the inscription being made in ancient Phoenician characters. That square was, as Schliemann emphasized, much larger than the diameter of the vase's neck. He could not explain how it could have been put inside. Then there were a few other smaller articles made of the same metal, a few coins, also of the same metal and objects made of fossilized bone.

Some of the objects, the owl-headed vase and a bronze vase mentioned in the sealed envelope found in the owl-like vase bore inscriptions of

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THE FERTILITY OF

by

NELSON S. BOND

Dalrymple Todd was the most amazing man who ever lived! All he had to do was to *think* vegetables and fruits, and they sprouted from his hair!

I WAS having a hell of a time with my cartoon strip that day. I had a central figure, something about a Philadelphia lawyer who could put two baseballs in his mouth, but I didn't have a single oddity for the border spots. It was hot, and I was tired, and getting sorer by the minute. I guess I was pretty curt when someone knocked on the door.

"Come in!" I yelled, and this stranger eased into the room.

Hell's bells, what a man! Gargantuanly fat; so fat that the Beef Trust gals would have been pygmies in comparison. He goggled at me wistfully for a moment, sliding from one

"See," remarked the little man. "I can grow anything you want. Now, if there's anything . . ."

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foot to another like a jittery elephant. Finally he piped,

"Are—are you the man who draws the cartoon, 'Ain't It The Truth?' "

"That's me," I told him. "Why? Who sent you here?"

"Nobody. I just came. I think I've got something for you."

Another one of those phony screwballs. They pop in all the time. Probably his name was "I Bark," or something like that, and he drew it, so it looked like a dog. I chucked him a pad and pencil, and turned back to my board. I said,

"Draw it on there, pal. And don't forget to close the door as you go out."

For an instant he stood there, the drawing pad and pencil in his hands, staring at me with a vacuous expression on his pan, as if I'd thrown the Gordian knot in his face. Then his lips opened and his face turned red.

"Oh, no!" He looked indignant. "It's not that at all. You don't understand. I—I can grow things."

"Grow things?" I said. "Brother, are you trying to pull my leg?"

He folded himself into a chair, collapsing at the joints like a carpenter's rule. He took off his hat, unveiling a mop of scrambled hair that looked like a bewildered black chrysanthemum. He leaned forward; stared at me with big,

"Heck, no!" I shouted. "If you grow any more vegetables in here, I'll have you clapped in jail . . ."

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humid eyes.

"Yes. In my hair. Do you want to see?"

I stood up, forcing a grin. I said, "Why, of course!" heartily—and edged toward the door. "Wait a minute. There are a couple other guys outside who'd like to—"

"Oh, *don't!*" he cried. There was a look of despair on his cadaverous features. "You're just like all the rest of them. You won't even give me a chance to—look! Peas!" he said.

I gulped and started. For there, right smack in the middle of that unruly tangle he called his hair, were a half-dozen green, marblelike objects. He shook his head, and they fell off. One of them rolled across the floor to my feet. I stopped and picked it up. It squashed in my fingers. I looked at it; smelled it.

Undeniably—it was a pea! He smiled triumphantly.

"See?" he said.

I said, "Hey—do that again!"

"What would you like to have? A fruit? A vegetable?"

I said, "A—a tomato."

"All right," he said. "Tomato!"

And there was a ripe, rosy tomato, coyly nestling in his hair! He handed it to me.

"Taste it!" he said. "It's good. See, I can grow anything. Apples, turnips, beans—"

THINGS started plopping on the floor squishily. It looked like bank night at a fruit stand. But now I got it. I strode across the room, grabbed him by the collar, and yanked him to his feet.

"Okay, pal!" I snarled, "Trying to make a sucker out of me, eh? Well, it doesn't work. Now—beat it!"

He was big, but not strong. He pushed easy. I got him all the way to the door before he managed to yelp.

"But I'm not trying to make a sucker out of you. I really *can* do it! I—"

"Sure," I said. "And Thurston could make drayhorses float in mid-air. So what? I'm not using my cartoon to give publicity to any tinhorn sleight-of-hand expert. Scram!"

He piped vexedly, *"Oh!* Oh, if you only knew what I *think* of you—"

"Leave it outside!" I said grumpily. "I've got work to do." I shoved him, and he went flying. I returned to my board.

I heard him fussing and fiddling around out there for a few minutes; muttering under his breath. Then his footsteps slap-slapped down the hall. I scratched into my files and found a few items to use. One was about an armless Alpine guide; another on a two-headed pig from a farm near Keokuk, Iowa.

Just as I was putting the final curlicue on the pig's tail, Willy Cardell came in. Willy is copy boy for the Art Department. He looked like he'd been wading around in a bowl of overripe Jello. His shoes were dripping juicily, and his trousers were stained to the calves. He glared at me angrily.

"Hey, Michelangelo!" he yelled. "What's the big idea? You going huckster on us?"

I said, "Why? What's the matter?"

"Matter! Look at this!"

He held open the door so I could see. Outside, where my visitor had stomped around muttering his opinion of me, was a pile of fruit, knee deep! About four bushel baskets of—raspberries!

WELL, that was that. I wondered about it for a while, then finally forgot my raspberry-sprinkling visitor. I might never have thought of him again had I not gone to Pete's Chili Kitchen one midnight for a jolt of liquid cayenne.

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Pete himself served me. And while he was dunking his thumb in the goulash he mourned,

"Noive of the guy! A bowl an' a spoon, he says, an' fill the bowl wit' hot water. Hot water! They's a hell of a lot of profit in that, now, isn't they?"

I agreed, "They isn't!" cheerfully. "What's he want to do, Pete? Take a bath?"

"Ast him!" Pete jerked a thumb toward a booth in the back of the joint. "Me, I don't want no truck wit' such cheap skates!" He waddled off.

It was late, and Pete's place was lonely. Beside, I was curious. So I strolled back to the other booth and found—my erstwhile visitor! He was placidly spooning a thick, steamy potage. He looked up as I approached; smiled amiably.

"Hello!" he said.

"So!" I said. "Fancy meeting you here, pal. Thanks for the berries."

He said, "Oh—*them!*" and flushed. "I'm sorry about that. But I was a little peeved when I left, and I couldn't help thinking—"

I sat down. I said, "That's all right, bud. I don't blame you for getting sore. I was out of sorts that day. And that trick of yours *was* clever. I still can't see where you got all those damned raspberries. I know they weren't up your sleeve."

"Of course not," he said plaintively. "They're never up my sleeve. I told you—they're in my hair."

"Now," I grunted, "you're getting in mine again. I'm not asking how you do it. All I want to know is—"

He said, suddenly, "How's your chili?"

Well, I didn't blame him for not wanting to explain. I grinned, and ladled up a mouthful of the stuff.

"Okay," I said. "A little thinnish, maybe. A few more kidney beans—"

"Kidney beans!" he said.

And there they were again—a whole darned handful of kidney beans, all tangled up in his curly locks. He reached up and unsnagged them.

"You'll have to shell them," he said sheepishly. "I'm sorry about that."

I stared. I said hoarsely, "Where did you get those things? I was watching your hands. They were on the table!"

He looked mildly reproachful.

"But of course! Where else should they be?"

I rose angrily. "Fun's fun, guy. I like a joke as much as the next man. But when a fake magician starts mixing business into everyday life, I say he's going a little too far. So good night, and the hell with you, Mr.—"

"Todd," he said. "Dalrymple Todd."

"*Who*-rimple Todd?" I demanded.

"Dalrymple. D for dates. A for apricots. L as in lemon. R for—"

Something went *splash!* in his soup. I yelled. As he spoke, things started popping out of his hair. Dates and apricots. A lemon. A rutabaga. Common sense told me to beat it. But my legs refused to move. My spine felt like the spiral binding on the back of a loose-leaf notebook.

I MOANED weakly, "Todd—stand up, will you?"

He did. I looked on the seat, under it. I patted his pockets, his sleeves, his trouser legs. He didn't have a thing on him but the things a man normally carries—a handkerchief, watch, billfold, some loose silver. Pen and pencil.

I choked, "Todd — say 'alligator pear.'" Alligator pears were out of season. I wanted to know, once and for all—

"Alligator pear!" he said.

We both grabbed for it at the same time. It writhed out of his hirsute jungle, fresh, green, appetizing. I

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slumped back into my seat.

I groaned, "All right, Todd, you win! Tell me. How do you do it?"

His brow furrowed. "I don't know. I just say the name of any growing thing and—there it is!"

"But," I expostulated, "it's mad! Preposterous! If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I'd say impossible! Contrary to every law of chemistry, physics—"

"I know. When it first started, several months ago, I was frantic with fear and wonder. I visited a doctor—"

"What did he say?"

Todd shuddered. "He tried to take a section from my scalp flesh. Just as he made his incision, I happened to think what a dried-up little prune he was. A prune popped out and hit him in the eye. He screamed for the police. I had to run."

"And then?"

"Well, I've never gone to see another doctor. But I read every book I could find on gardening, soil culture, heredity. They tell me nothing except that it's impossible. And it can't be *that,* you know"—he looked at me sadly—"because it happens."

I suggested, "Maybe it's the way you wear your hair."

"Frowzy like this, you mean? I can't help it. If I went to a barber, I might start thinking about a flower or a fruit, and scare him to death. I trim it myself. And even that's a task. I get the comb halfway through, and start thinking what a peach— *Whoops!* There it goes again!"

He stared woefully at the peach which lay between us. I picked it up; tasted it. It was perfect.

I said, "You realize, of course, that I can't feature this in my cartoon strip."

"I suppose not," he agreed dully.

"I'd be hooted off Broadway. The people in the sticks would call me the biggest liar since Ananias. But, say—" I got a sudden inspiration. "Do you want to commercialize your ability?"

"How?"

"The stage!" I said. "Vaudeville's almost dead, but there's enough left to give you a start. And there's Hollywood, and the radio—"

He unfolded his lanky length from the booth. His big, watery eyes were wide with excitement.

"I *could,* couldn't I?" he said. "My goodness! Why didn't *I* think of that? How can I ever thank you!"

"Don't thank me. Make me your agent. For ten percent of your earnings—"

"Ten!" he piped. "Make it twenty! Why, the pair of us—*Oh!*"

So a pear hopped from his head. I put it in my pocket. I thought I might get hungry later on . . .

THUS began Dalrymple Todd's rise to fame. We opened in Brooklyn—and he was terrific. We went to Philadelphia, and he rolled 'em in the aisles. Broadway demanded a look-see. We went to Radio City. And wowed 'em there. The crowd didn't unthaw till he walked down the aisles, giving customers whatever fruit, vegetable or flower they named. Then they went nuts. They thought it was a hoax—but *what* a hoax!

A lawsuit shoved us on page one. A guy from the Bronx claimed his son got indigestion on a Todd-grown apple. The suit was tossed out of court when our lawyer discovered the judge was an orchid fancier and Todd gave him a whole armful.

Then Hollywood beckoned, putting on a bidding spree that made the chant of the tobacco auctioneer sound like an Alabama drawl. We signed, finally, with Superba films—for a salary that looked like a three months' WPA appropria-

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tion.

Todd's first short, "Hearts and Flowers," outdrew the most ballyhooed melodrama of the year. There was some talk of giving him an Academy "Oscar." DeMille wanted him for an extravaganza, "Forbidden Fruit." Disney pleaded frantically for the privilege of caricaturing him in a retake of "Ferdinand."

Everything was fine. Everything was super-colossal. And then—

Todd fell in love!

I learned it at the set. This picture we were filming was based somewhat nebulously on the legend of Merlin, magician of King Arthur's court. Bolski, the director, was preparing to shoot the love scene between young Merlin and the witch-queen of Umbria, Morgan le Fay.

"Awright," he said. "Now in this scene, Mr. Todd, you an' the dame are showin' off your magic. She waves her hand an' comes up with a bracelet—you got that bracelet up your sleeve, Miss Honeycutt?"

"Yes, Mr. Bolski."

"Good. Well, she dares you to beat her trick. Then you bring an apple outa your hair, Miss Honeycutt, you're startled, see? You think it's a phony. You make your maid take a bite outa the apple. Got it?"

They both nodded.

"Awright. So we're shootin'. Camera!"

The Kleigs went on, and the "take" signal flashed. Morgan le Fay smiled langorously from her nest of cushions.

"We have our own magicks in Umbria, Merlin, my pertling," she said. "Say—couldst match *this* with thy guile?"

Her arms made a weaving motion. The bracelet sprang into view. "Merlin" Todd smiled serenely. Two grand's worth of voice culture hadn't taken the squeak out of his pipes, but it got by.

He yipped,

"'Tis a gay ruse, my queen. Yet man hath wrought that bauble. Couldst conjure from thy very self a fruit of freshest growth?"

His eyes met those of the queen; turned to the serving maid beside her. His lips wrestled with a word. Then—

It was flowers! Peonies. Larkspurs. Daffodils. A regular all-fired bouquet of flowers!

"Cut!" screamed Bolski. He raced onto the set, his pudgy hands pawing the air. "Not flowers, Todd. An apple! The script calls for an apple!"

DALRYMPLE Todd flushed miserably. "I—I know."

Bolski looked panic-stricken. He husked, "Can't you—can't you *make* an apple?"

"Yes, sir." Meekly.

"Then do it! An apple it must be. Could the maid eat maybe a flower?"

Why waste words? They tried it again. And again. They tried it until Morgan le Fay trembled so, she could hardly draw the bracelet out of her sleeve. Until perspiration made Todd's greasepaint streaky. But it was no go. Every time the maid stepped into the picture, Todd's eyes lit strangely. And —more flowers!

I was the first to catch on. I grabbed Bolski's arm, yelled,

"Look—have you got another girl to play the part of the maid?"

"Millions!" he moaned. "Billions, maybe. But only one Merlin, and he can't make no apple!"

"Then get another girl!" I snapped. "Put her in that part. I'll bet my last buck you get your apple!"

He did. *And they did!*

But on the way home, Todd raved at me. "Her first real part in pictures," he stormed, "and you took it from her!"

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"If I hadn't," I told him, "it would have been your *last* part. You're in love with that girl, aren't you?"

His long legs twined about each other like reluctant corkscrews. He blushed.

"How did you know?"

"How could I help knowing? Does she love you?"

"She doesn't even know I exist. Worse than that, she thinks I'm a sort of freak." He shook his head mournfully. "And she's right, too. No girl would marry a human hothouse like me."

"How do you know?" I countered. "Have you asked her?"

"What's the use?" He muttered fatuously, "Roses are red, violets are blue; I grew this bouquet, dear, just for you!" And started picking up the flowers he'd sprinkled as he spoke.

I yelled, "Stop it, you dope! Don't waste energy like that! If you love the girl, tell her so!"

Two big tears rolled down his cheeks. "I know what she'd say. No, I'm doomed to live alone, unloved, for the rest of my life—"

A bright blue flower floated gently to the floor of the sedan. It was a bachelor's button. . . .

That was the beginning of the end. Since the girl had been taken from the cast and another substituted, things had gone along smoothly enough, but Dalrymple Todd's heart wasn't in his work. I could tell that by the quality of his botanical subjects. The lilies he provided for Guinevere's wedding were scrawny. The scene where he supplied a legion of besieged knights with fresh fruits and vegetables almost caused a revolt among the extras, who had to eat the stuff. The fruits were bitter. And the vegetables were—well, what's a polite way of saying "rotten?"

Then I found out why. A guy named Ethelred R. Clutz visited me one morning to voice a grievance. Todd, Clutz insisted, was unfair. His attack on the American Brotherhood of Florists and Horticulturists must stop. It was deliberate restraint of trade. The ABF&H lawyers had studied the facts of the case. Since some of the flowers had been sent to a Miss Smythe when she was outside the State of California, the Interstate Commerce Commission would be informed—

I SAID, "Wait a minute! You mean Todd has been sending flowers to this girl?"

By the crate and truckload, stormed Mr. Clutz. Out of season, too. Flowers that honest, hard-working dealers could not hope to duplicate. Moreover, Mr. Todd had been producing these flowers himself. Since each home-grown blossom represented a loss of revenue to the members of the ABF&H, the union—

I soothed him and booted him out. But when Todd came home, I relayed the accusation. He flushed guiltily.

"Yes, Len." That's me, Len Wright. "I have been sending Susan flowers. Every day." He lifted wistful eyes to mine. "I can't make her notice me any other way. I thought that if I—" He faltered. "They say flowers are the way to a woman's heart . . ."

"They're the way to the poorhouse!" I howled. "You can't do your best work at the studios when you stay up all night growing flowers for *her!* I don't know how that fertile knob of yours operates, but—but think of your future!"

He sighed, "Future, Len? I have no future without—her!"

We had another visitor, too. A short, grumpy-looking chap whose card read, "Hepplewhite Frey, FFCB." He stalked to Todd's side; studied his scalp thoughtfully.

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I said, "Yes, Mr. Frey? What can we do for you?"

Frey jotted a note in a small book. Then he drew an imaginary line down the middle of Todd's cranium.

"Here!" he said. "This is your boundary. The Government can't permit further cultivation."

"Permit *what?*" I demanded.

"Overproduction. I'm from the Federal Farm Conservation Board. Crop control bureau. There've been complaints about this man. He'll have to plow the left side under. Is this your total acreage, Mr. Todd?"

Todd said faintly, "Huh?"

"You don't cultivate your chest?"

"No-no."

"Very well." Frey snapped his book. "Have no fear. You will be compensated for the uncultivated area. Uncle Sam will allow you—let me see—thirteen cents, four mills, for your plowed-under domains. The Government"—he smiled majestically—"protects its agriculturists. Good day!"

He left. I stared at Todd with horror. "Dal—will a haircut really stop it?" I asked.

"I don't know. I honestly don't know."

"Because if it doesn't—" I began. Then I stopped. For the first time in weeks, I was viewing Dalrymple Todd's black mane at close range. And making a horrible discovery. His temples were farther back than before. His hairline was receding. Dalrymple Todd was—going bald!

His movie picture was almost completed. There was just one final scene to shoot: that in which Dal Todd as the aged Merlin, demonstrates his magical powers by creating a watermelon. Don't ask me why Bolski wanted a watermelon. I pointed out to him that the Round Table lads had never heard of them. But that didn't matter. A watermelon was big. A watermelon was impressive. And this was Hollywood. So a watermelon it must be—no? Yes!

DURING rehearsals, Bolski let Todd produce little things, like grapes and kumquats. But finally he said,

"Now we shoot, Mr. Todd. Remember, it gives a watermelon—an' a big one—for the final scene. Get it?"

Todd nodded wearily. The cameras started grinding.

The scene rolled along smoothly. Then came the part where a smart-aleck young magician derides Merlin as being a has-been. Merlin, now old and gray, sinks into his chair—

Todd sank to the chair. I saw his lips frame the word, "Watermelon!" A huge, green crest bulged from the thinning tangle of his hair. It grew and grew. The cameras ground on. Beside me, Bolski watched with bated breath. Even the actors' eyes bulged with unfaked astonishment. This was Todd's *coup;* his greatest effort. The melon grew. Half-grown, now . . . almost three-quarters. And then—

Todd stopped. He groaned.

Bolski forgot the sound warning. Excitedly he yelled,

"Go on, Todd! Don't stop now!"

Dalrymple Todd raised tortured eyes to us.

He moaned, "I can't!"

I leaped forward. I said, "Dal—what do you mean?"

"It—it won't grow any more."

Bolski yipped, "But you gotta! Just a little more. Please! Another thought, maybe!"

Todd shut his eyes; knotted his fists. His face was white with concentration. His lips moved. Then, weakly—

"It's no use. I can't. And—and I've got a splitting headache!"

No wonder! I yelled, "Get a doctor!

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Get a—a botanist. A tree surgeon! Get *somebody*—quick!"

People scurried and yelped. The place was a bedlam. Then, suddenly, there was a quiet voice at my side. A voice that said:

"Dalrymple—"

Todd looked up, his eyes widening in gladness.

"Susan!" he cried.

Bolski and I saw it at the same time. We both high-tailed it out of the scene.

Bolski screamed, "Camera!"

For the watermelon bulging from Todd's conk had suddenly altered. About the great, green semi-globe, sprang a veritable garden of gorgeous flowers. Fragrance flooded the set. Roses, geraniums, orchids, snapdragons—oh, name anything you can think of—poured from Todd's fertile scalp in mad profusion. Chief of all wonders was that amazing sight: a thing half watermelon, half lilac bush . . .

Susan and Dal Todd locked in each other's arms. They were kissing.

"I had to come, my dear," she was murmuring. "When the flowers stopped coming, I knew you must need me—" Blossoms cascaded about them, a jungle of riotous beauty.

Bolski yelled, "Cut! Cut!" and smacked me on the back. "Terrific!" he squalled. "Magnificent! Another triumph for Superba!

But that was the swan song of Dalrymple Todd. For suddenly the blooms stopped falling. And in the unimpassioned glare of the Kliegs, I saw another glow that made me weep out loud. Todd's scalp. He was as bald as a mirror. His labors had finally destroyed him. He was just another victim of—soil erosion!

THAT'S about all. Susan and Dal Todd have been married now for a year. I'm back at my job drawing "Ain't It The Truth?" But my office isn't in New York. I'm sticking pretty close to the Todds.

Because, you see, there's a youngster now. A cute kid, too. Named Len, after me. And I'm still young enough to be the kid's manager when—. No, of course, I don't expect he'll inherit his old man's strange fertility. That was a freak; something that happens once in a millennium. But at the same time—

Well, I'll tell you. The other night when we went into young Len's nursery to look at him while he was asleep, we found him clutching a bright, new, shiny toy automobile. Susan hadn't given it to him. His Daddy hadn't given it to him. Nor had I. And there had been no other visitors.

A thing like that makes you wonder, doesn't it?

THE HUMAN BLOOD HOUND

VICTOR FORBIN, Parisian scientist, tells of a drug that turns a human being into a bloodhound. This drug is found among the Counas, a tribe of Indians in the interior of Colombia.

A young Indian was given a concoction of this drug. After drinking it he fell into a short sleep. When he awoke a rope was tied to each of his shoulders and the free ends held by two strong men.

Suddenly, uttering a cry, the drugged youth leaped to his feet in a bound, and rushing out of the door, dragged the two guards with him. After a wild chase that lasted twenty minutes, the Indian stopped abruptly opposite a clump of bushes which hid a crevice at the foot of a wall of rocks.

In the half-shadow the white cloth of a bundle of meat, which M. Forbin had placed there previously, was clearly discernible. The youth then seized the bundle. The drug had made a blood hound of a human being. The witchdoctor then took a small gourd from his loin cloth. This gourd contained an antidote which he made the young Indian drink. The effects of the drug gradually wore off and the youth began to mutter as he was awakening from his drugged state.

The name of the drug is *anhalonidin*. It is a cactus-like drug which has marked narcotic and tetanic actions. It also has marked tonic actions on the heart, lungs, and blood vessels. Its exact chemical composition is not known at present.

Edward Podolsky, M.D.

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(Concluded from page 47)

great age, all made in ancient Phoenician. And all read alike: "From King Chronos of Atlantis."

Furthermore, it was mentioned that Heinrich Schliemann (the archeologist) had examined a number of pieces in the French Louvre in Paris, that had been found at Tihuanaku in Central America, and that were exactly like those others that the elder Schliemann was said to have found among the ruins of the second city of Troy.

It was claimed that the kind of clay used in making the vases was exactly alike, that the alloy of the articles that were made of metal was exactly the same, and that there were even things made of fossilized bone. In short, the two finds looked exactly alike, only that those from Troy bore inscriptions and those from Central America did not.

Paul Schliemann then claimed that he devoted six years to studies in Central America, in Egypt and in archeological museums all over the world. He claimed that he got a copy of a Chaldean manuscript from a Buddha Temple at Lhasa, which told the same story as the Maya inscriptions from Central America. All this, he said, furnished definite proof that Atlantis had actually been a continent in the Atlantic Ocean, that civilization had originated on that continent, and that Egypt and the Mayan Empire had been nothing but colonies of Atlantis.

That proof had been established, Schliemann said, by his grandfather, but he still was not permitted to speak about certain things. The same applied to his own researches. Atlantis had to remain mysterious for a few more years.

"But if I desired to say everything I know, there would be no mystery about it," he concluded the article.

The whole thing had the classification of a hoax written in large and heavy letters all over its face. It was only the name of Schliemann that made other scientists wonder a little. After all, before Heinrich Schliemann excavated Troy, the majority of archeologists had been very doubtful about that city. In spite of everything the original Schliemann had found it . . .

But after only a short while of hesitation, archeologists began to grumble. There were too many things that did not sound right. In general, the kind of Atlantis described in that article was the same that had been "proved" by Ignatius Donnelly in his once famous book, "Atlantis, the Antediluvian World."

Experts had grown very suspicious of Donnelly's ideas and conclusions in the meantime. The mention of the Buddha Temple of Lhasa sounded very much like Blavatsky. The Mayan manuscripts that Paul Schliemann could allegedly read (nobody else can) smacked of Augustus Le Plongeon, who had just twice as much imagination as desirable for a man who wants to be taken seriously.

Nor was this all. The alloy of the metal square and the coins had been analyzed by experts—at least, according to Paul Schliemann—and had been found to consist of platinum, aluminum and copper. Explanations were lacking as to why the Atlanteans had concocted such a mixture that could not possess any very special properties.

Further, it was hard to see why the Atlanteans should have used two "difficult" metals like platinum and aluminum, one of them being very hard to melt, the other being still harder to obtain in its metallic form. In spite of all this internal evidence, scientists still waited with their condemnation. Schliemann had promised to write a book; maybe that book would explain those apparent discrepancies.

But the book never appeared. And nobody ever saw (or remembered having seen) a single one of all those articles made of platinum-copper—aluminum alloy and inscribed with Phoenician characters. Nor did anybody remember having seen Dr. Schliemann at work at the sites he mentioned. And excavations, like the building of cities, cannot very well be made in secrecy. Paul Schliemann, when attacked, remained silent. In fact, he disappeared completely.

Finally one archeologist, Alexander Bessmertny, tried to go back to the first source, the friends of the elder Heinrich Schliemann. He approached Professor Wilhelm Dörpfeld, who replied:

"I gladly inform you that I have already been asked about the report made by Dr. Paul Schliemann, although I do not recall by whom. As far as I can remember, I replied at that time as I have to reply to you, too, that Heinrich Schliemann did not work extensively on the Atlantis problem, at least not to my knowledge. I never heard about activities concerning Atlantis from him, although I was his assistant from 1882 till 1890, the year of his death.

"It is true that we talked about Atlantis occasionally, and I think it likely that Heinrich Schliemann may have collected notes about Atlantis. But I do not believe that he carried out any work on that theme himself."

Thus ends the story of Paul Schliemann's "discovery" of Atlantis, a theme that is infested with enough difficulties as it is without need for further complications by impudent and untrue assertions.

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The Strange Voyage

"Welcome to Olympus," said the man with the winged sandals, extending his hand

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# of Hector Squinch

Terror smote at meek little Hector Squinch as he realized the horrible truth. He was trapped in a space ship bound for—where?

by DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

"I DON'T know why I ever married you, Hector Squinch!" For a moment the shrewish voice ceased while a pair of exasperated eyes swept their gaze scornfully up and down Hector's quaking form. Then the voice went on:

"Go and see your silly science exhibits," it stormed. "Here's sixty cents for your dinner. I'm going to see things for myself. And mind you, meet me here at six o'clock. If you don't . . ."

"Yes, Cynthia," Hector said meekly, properly awed by the unvoiced threat in her voice. He well knew what the "if" meant; he'd gone through two-week sessions of reenacting the life of a worm many times before. "I'll be here, I promise I will."

"You'd better!" Cynthia snapped and swept majestically away into the crowd.

When she had vanished, Hector leaned against a statue just inside the Hall of Science, and tried to assume an air of nonchalance he didn't feel. Short and sly-shouldered, Hector was not the jaunty type. And as he peered rather wistfully at the happy throngs milling through the turnstiles for the opening day of the 1940 World's Fair, he looked even more like what he actually was—one of Life's pipsqueaks.

Hector began to make plans for his

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two hours of freedom.

There was a bubble dancer at the Parisian Inn—Hector closed his eyes and sighed—whom he was sure Cynthia would not approve of. And then there was his hobby. He fancied himself as something of an Edison, or maybe a Newton. At any rate he liked science. Cynthia didn't approve of science either. So Hector planned to kill two birds with one stone. He was going to drink in all the science he could, for an hour, and then he would seek out the bubble dancer. He felt almost devilish.

Joining the sluggishly moving line of spectators, Hector Squinch, pale eyes beginning to glint enthusiastically behind his horn rimmed spectacles, drank in the glories he beheld. Whirling gadgets, bubbling tubes of multicolored liquids, fascinating charts and wires—all these received his excited study. He didn't have much idea of what any of them were about. But they were all quite scientific. That was all that mattered.

He was leaving the "Woman of the Future" exhibit when he saw it.

For a moment the little man almost fainted from sheer excitement. It was incredible. It was magnificent. It was glorious. It was a rocket ship, part of the "Transportation of the Future" exhibit. The mere implications of the huge, bullet-like vessel sent Hector's imagination scurrying feverishly to Elysian fields. *A rocket ship!*

Crowds jostled by him, pushing, elbowing, but Hector was totally unaware of anything save the ravishing beauty of the metal monster. A space ship, a *real* life-size, space ship!

It left Hector Squinch very breathless, and for more than half an hour he stood with skeptical audiences listening to a uniformed attendant's lectures on the craft. After the conclusion of each lecture, the guide conducted a brief tour of inspection through the huge ship. Hector followed dazedly along on each of these inspections.

The inside of the rocket ship was very similar—except for gadgets—to the inside of a giant transport plane. There were rows of seats, separated by a tiny aisle, which faced the nose of the ship where there was a sort of pilot's seat. On each inspection, when the audience was invited to sit down, Hector edged timidly further forward—wishing that he had the courage to try the pilot's seat, to sit in it, to pretend he was—in fact—the pilot.

Instead, however, he contented himself with the regular seats where, unnoticed, he could close his eyes and conjure visions of exciting interplanetary voyages and furious battles with Martians. In each of these day dreams Hector Squinch was the hero, and a sharp voiced woman named Cynthia was noticeably absent.

Hector was bidding adieu to a beautiful Martian woman, whom he had just rescued from peril by means of blazing rocket pistols. Then, in spite of the bravado of his dream, the danger of his position frightened him into wakefulness. He opened his eyes abruptly. Looking wildly about, he became aware that he had dozed, that the inspection party had left the ship. He was alone.

FOR an awful instant his stomach had the uneasy sensation that follows a swift drop in an elevator. He glanced quickly at his watch. It was 6:30. He had been napping for over a half hour! Looking out the window beside him, he could see that the attendant was gone, more than likely to dinner, and that the crowds around the exhibit had vanished. Hector was grateful. He would have no embarrassing explanations to make to the guide or spectators. Stand-

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ing up, he moved down the aisle to the door.

Tugging at the knob, Hector pulled inward, then out. It seemed to be stuck. Putting all his strength into the effort, he tried again. It *was* stuck!

Feverishly Hector threw his shoulder against the door, wincing as he was rewarded with only a sharp pain for his trouble. Quite suddenly it came to Hector that he was locked in. Beads of sweat trickled down his brow. He gazed owlishly through the thick window. He wished now that there was someone outside, remembering as he did, that it was dinner time. He banged futilely on the window.

Hector sat down and thought of suffocation. He thought, too, of Cynthia. The thought of suffocation was more pleasant, so he returned to it, remembering the stories he'd read in newspapers about such things.

"I must not lose my head," Hector told himself firmly.

Somewhere he had read something about doors that opened from the inside as well as the outside. You pushed a button and they opened. Hector began to search for buttons. He found all sorts of them.

With every button he pushed, Hector rushed to the door and tried it. After the tenth unsuccessful button, Hector was growing frankly terrified.

"I must be calm," he said aloud.

But supposing he ran out of buttons? The thought was terrifying. He shuddered and began a search for more buttons, working up toward the nose of the ship.

It happened very suddenly. He had pressed a large red button to the right of the pilot's seat, and was running back to try the door, when hell broke loose.

He felt the floor rising violently to meet his face, and heard a shattering, splattering roar at the same instant. The Hall of Science was still reverberating to the crescendo of rockets exploding when a blazing streak of silver screamed skyward, leaving a ragged gap in the roof of the exhibition hall. Hector was riding in the blazing streak. He'd pressed the wrong button!

MINUTES later, still dazed and with a bloody nose, Hector pulled himself painfully to his feet, vaguely aware that something had happened. Supporting himself with one hand on the back of a seat, he leaned over to the window, momentarily afraid that people would be descending on him from all corners of the hall. He had a feeling that he might have blown a fuse—or something.

Hector looked blankly out the window for perhaps three full seconds before he grew conscious of what he was gazing at. Instead of the familiar surroundings of the Hall of Science, he was staring out at a frighteningly dark emptiness.

Far back in the distance a ball, very much like the tiny globe of the earth which he kept in his bedroom at home, was fading into nothingness. The realization of his plight didn't descend on his consciousness gradually. It hit with the speed and force of a mule kick. He was speeding through space, that was the only possible explanation!

Hector didn't waste time. He fainted promptly.

* * *

HECTOR didn't know how long he'd been lying on the floor of the rocket ship, but as consciousness came flooding back to him he recalled instantly what had happened.

For a moment he crouched trembling on the floor, not daring to rise to a level that would enable him to look out the windows. At last, steeling himself against another swoon, he rose to his

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feet and made his way unsteadily forward to the nose of the rocket. Uneasily, he took a seat in the pilot's compartment, his eyes fixed determinedly on the floor. Hector recalled that workers on tall buildings never looked down.

He wished he knew what the gadgets on the instrument panel before him meant.

Suddenly, and for no apparent reason, Hector thought again of Cynthia. He shuddered at the picture of his wife's face. She would be terribly angry with him when he returned.

When he returned. He almost choked on the thought. *Would* he return?

Hector wished fervently that he knew where he was going. Then he'd be able to tell if there would be any returning. Hysterically, it occurred to him that he might be headed for Mars. He shuddered violently, remembering the famous Welles broadcast.

After a while—how long he couldn't tell—time had become a vague blur to Hector Squinch. His watch had been broken as he fell to the floor when the ship shot from the exhibition hall. After what seemed to be an eternity, Hector felt his eyelids growing heavy. Then he was asleep.

* * *

IT WAS daylight when the dipping of the ship threw the fast slumbering Mr. Squinch to the floor. Waking instantly, Hector perceived what was happening. The ship, which had been climbing before, was now pointing downward. There was no doubt of this in his mind as he worked his way forward to the front porthole of the rocket and peered out through the thick paned glass.

A ball, still very much like the globe on his desk at home, was rushing headlong at the ship—or vice versa!

Nearer and nearer came the globe, growing larger with every passing second. There didn't seem to be any way of avoiding a collision. Frantically, Hector realized that the ship and the object were due to collide within a very few minutes. In desperation the little man fought his way to the rear of the ship. There he clutched in a frenzy of hysteria to one of the cushioned seats, bracing himself for the shock he knew was coming. Hector closed his eyes and prayed.

"WHAT'S he muttering?" asked the bland, plump little man in the ridiculous looking nightshirt.

"Now I lay me down to sleep," replied the bronzed young man kneeling next to the body.

"Funny thing to be muttering," mused the plump little man. "They usually say 'where am I' or something equally unoriginal." He looked across the field at the huge steel bullet-like ship, which had landed like an arrow, nose in the mud.

At that instant Hector Squinch regained consciousness. He sat bolt upright, looking about in amazement.

"Where am I?" he asked.

A series of groans came from the crowd.

"You shouldn't have said that," said a handsome young face bending over him.

Hector looked at the face, then at the body under the face. The fellow was dressed in something resembling a Grecian toga. To his amazement everyone else in the group standing around him was similarly garbed. Everyone, that is, with the exception of the rotund little bald man in the nightshirt, who advanced toward him and spoke.

"Welcome to Olympus," said the nightshirted gentleman.

"Olympus?" Hector was baffled.

"Olympus," repeated the nightshirt firmly, "welcome to it."

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"Who are you?" Hector managed to gasp.

"The Civic Betterment Bureau and Chamber of Commerce Greeting Committee for the Planet Olympus," said the little man, with no apparent loss of breath.

"We, the citizens of Olympus, welcome you to our fair planet," the nightshirted chap continued. "Consider each and every one of us at your service during your stay here."

He reached into his nightshirt which, Hector noted, was equipped with pockets, and drew forth a large key.

"Allow me," he murmured pleasantly, "to present the key to the planet."

Bewildered, Hector took the key and stood up. Suddenly it was snatched from his grasp. To his astonishment he saw that the plump little fellow had taken it back.

"Thank you," said the man in the nightshirt coldly. "You aren't supposed to *keep* it, y'know. It's merely a gesture. It's the only key we have. Besides, it doesn't open anything."

The plump little man put one hand behind his back, one foot forward, and cleared his throat. He opened his mouth to speak.

"Come on!" The bronzed young man seized Hector by the arm. "This is where we came in. He's starting his welcome speech."

Swiftly he propelled Hector across the field to a nearby road. The rest of the group also took flight, leaving the little man in the nightshirt quite to himself. But apparently the rotund little nut didn't mind, for he kept right on speaking.

"And we can point with pride," were the last of his words which Hector heard before they were out of hearing.

"PLEASE," said Hector as he sat in the back of a sleek limousine whipping swiftly along a country road, "what's all this about? Who are you people? Where am I? Who was the man in the nightshirt? What's all that talk about Olympus?"

The bronzed young man, now sitting on his right, smiled disarmingly.

"Whoa! One question at a time. To begin with, you're on the Planet Olympus. We are, as we said before, citizens of Olympus."

Hector Squinch felt that he might be going insane. He took a grip on himself.

"Olympus," he said as evenly as he could, "is inhabited by the gods."

"That's right!" The bronzed young man was beaming.

"Then you, you people, are gods?" Hector bleated.

"Sure. Why not?"

Hector could think of no answer to that.

The young man continued. "My name, incidentally, is Bacchus. I'm the god of wine and rioting, y'know. You'll like it here, I think," he went on. "That pudgy fellow in the nightshirt was Morpheus, god of sleep. He's the local bore. Makes all the speeches at banquets, commencements, etc."

"Is he the chief greeter?" ventured Hector.

"Self-appointed," explained Bacchus. "Never misses a chance to run off at the mouth."

Hector looked at the assorted personalities draped in and around the limousine in which they rode.

"Are all these other people with us gods?" he whispered timidly.

"For the most part," Bacchus replied. "You'll get to meet more of them later. First of all, however, we have to take you down to the city hall to meet the mayor."

"The mayor?" Hector was startled.

"Sure," Bacchus declared. "The

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Big Shot, Jove. Chief of the planet."

The reception at the city hall was in keeping with the tenor of everything else that had occurred to Hector during the previous half hour. There was a drive through the city, motorcycle escort, cheering crowds lining the streets, and finally old Jove, himself, standing genially at the steps to greet him. He reminded Hector of pictures he had seen of General Grant.

With Bacchus to guide him, Hector posed for photographers. He shook hands with Jove, shook hands with Bacchus, shook hands with everybody and anybody while the flash bulbs popped. It was all very confusing.

SOMEHOW, he was finally seated across a mahogany desk in the mayor's office, facing Jove. The old man was speaking cheerfully about the weather, horse racing, and topics of a general nature, when he suddenly stroked his long black beard reflectively, stood up, and walked quickly over to the door. He paused there for a moment, listening with his finger to his lips.

"Good," he said finally, crossing the room and resuming his seat. "I was afraid someone was listening."

"No one is?" said Hector.

"Of course! Scads of people are outside eavesdropping on us," Jove declared happily. "Spies. All sorts of them."

Hector was completely bewildered. "You like that?"

"Why not?" Jove answered. "Shows I'm still important. When I get to the point where people don't even bother spying on me, I'll certainly have become unimportant. I'd hate to be unimportant."

Jove then reached behind his desk and pulled forth a box of cigars.

"Have one," he offered.

"I'm afraid I don't smoke," Hector confessed.

"Damned fine thing," Jove said cheerfully. "There was only one left in the box, anyway." His voice took on a confidential note. "How are you fixed for insurance?"

"Insurance?" Hector fairly bleated in astonishment.

"Sure. Life insurance. Good thing. I've a double-indemnity job here that'll be just the thing for the wife and kids. Got any kids?"

"No," said Hector. "I'm afraid I can't afford any now. That is, I'm afraid I can't afford any insurance."

"Oh," said Jove dismally, "if that's the way you feel about it." He pushed the sheaf of papers back in his drawer. "No harm in asking."

"But why do you sell insurance?" persisted Hector.

Jove waved a hand at the ornate furnishings of his office. "Don't let all these trappings fool you. Sure, I know, I'm mayor of Olympus. But times are tough. My salary isn't what it used to be. Been cut four times in the last six centuries. A chap just has to have a side racket to keep going."

"But life insurance on Olympus," stammered Hector. "I always thought the gods were immortal!"

Jove hushed his voice confidentially. "That's the hell of this racket," he admitted sadly.

With a flourish, Jove rose to his full six feet ten inches, pressed a buzzer on his desk, and smiled warmly at Hector.

"You're more than likely worn out from that trip. Want to get some rest. I've taken the liberty of arranging rooms for you at the Acropolis Hotel. One of our best."

Bacchus stepped into the room in response, apparently, to the buzzer.

Jove turned to the handsome, slightly dissipated young man.

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"Bacchus, I want you to take care of Mr.—" he paused, turning to Hector. "What name are you using?"

"Squinch, Hector Squinch."

"Fine," boomed Jove heartily. "Take care of Mr. Pinch, then, Bacchus. See that he gets around, sees the sights."

He paused to wink knowingly at Hector. "Bacchus," he explained, "is almost as fast as I used to be when I was younger."

Hector was being led dazedly from Jove's chambers when he and Bacchus almost ran into a beautiful blond woman, who was headed in the opposite direction.

"Hello, toots," Bacchus winked.

"Howzit, Big Boy," the blond answered. Then she was moving on, and they were walking down the hall.

"That blond girl," Hector stammered bewilderedly.

"Oh, her." Bacchus grinned. "That's Venus. She's private secretary to Jove." He nudged Hector slyly. "Some looker, eh?"

"Yes, yes she is, indeed," Hector agreed slightly hysterically, "but how can she be a secretary, how can she type, without any arms?"

Bacchus smiled. "She doesn't have to. Jove just likes her to sit in his lap and keep him company."

Hector walked on in shocked silence.

THE Acropolis Hotel was like nothing Hector had ever seen outside of the movies. It looked like a producer's dream of the Grand Hotel and the Ritz thrown together, with an annex built on. There was pride in the glance Bacchus gave him as they walked into the lobby.

"Nice joint, eh?".

"Nice," gasped Hector, "it's magnificent!"

They walked for what seemed to Hector to be several miles over deep, rich rugs to the registration desk. The clerk, a young toga-clad chap wearing severe spectacles, gazed frostily at Hector and his guide.

"Well?" He gave Hector a look that turned his knees to water.

Bacchus, however, was quite in stride.

"What sort of accommodations do you have in this flea-trap?" he demanded.

Taken aback, it was the clerk's turn to gasp.

Bacchus pinched Hector's arm.

"This gentleman would like your finest suite." He looked at Hector. "How many rooms, ten or twenty?"

"T-t-t-t-t-t-t-," Hector began.

"Twenty," said Bacchus to the clerk. "And make it snappy."

The clerk disappeared and Hector, now thoroughly awed, turned to Bacchus.

"How will I ever pay for such rooms?"

Bacchus frowned.

"Pay? Pay? Why, you don't, of course. All one has to do around this planet is sign an I.O.U."

"An I.O.U.?"

"Naturally. We did away with money years ago. It seemed as though no one ever had enough of it to suit them. So Jove got a brainstorm and established the I.O.U. system. Whenever anyone wants anything, he just has to sign an I.O.U. Now everyone who cares to be, is rich as hell."

Hector was dazed. Dazed but determined. He tried one last query.

"But what about the financial structure of Olympus? How can it hold up?"

"It doesn't hold up," Bacchus replied patiently. "It collapses once every week. But what difference does it make? No one has any money to lose. Jove calls in all the I.O.U.'s every Saturday, tears 'em up, and Monday we

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start all over again."

Hector didn't understand. It was too simple. There was no sense in arguing in the face of such stupendous simplicity.

FOR more than an hour Hector wandered about his twenty room suite. Bacchus had left him, saying he'd be back around supper time. And now Hector was finding his sanity in definite need of strengthening.

Hector bathed and Hector ate. Then Hector bathed again and ate again. The bathroom was the size of a gymnasium, the tub the proportions of a pool. The breakfast nook, in which Hector dined, must have been planned for a banquet hall.

In one of the rooms Hector found a radio. He turned it on and, much to his surprise, heard dance music flooding from it. He didn't recognize the tunes but they seemed nice enough. At the end of the dance program there was a fifteen minute news broadcast, which turned out to be that of a gossip columnist.

"What local belle," the columnist asked, "was very put out at a local night spot when a jealous girl friend turned her hair into snakes?"

Hector's jaw hung aghast as the Olympian Winchell continued his banter. He was even more amazed at the tune-off lines.

"You have just heard fifteen minutes of red hot news brought to you through the courtesy of the Morpheus Mattress Company," the announcer stated. "Tune in again tomorrow night for the showdown and the lowdown from the lips of the Oracle Of Delphi."

Hector staggered to a chair and collapsed gratefully into its depths.

As if delayed until this moment, the tremendous wallop carried in what had happened to him during the past twenty-four hours descended on Hector Squinch. He began to realize things. And, as he did so, he began to think.

In the little man's mind, wheels were spinning, making necessary adjustments.

There was no question now of either accepting or rejecting his fate. The situation was as it was. Nothing could change it. It existed. He was on Olympus, God knows how far from earth, and there was nothing he could do about it. He had to resign himself to circumstances. And resigning himself to circumstances was the easiest thing in the world for Hector. He couldn't have been married to Cynthia for fifteen years without learning how to do so.

Suddenly another thought struck him. For a moment its stunning implications left him breathless. *Did he really want to return to earth?* Was there anything on earth which was worth returning to?

Picking at the back of his mind was a sharp insistent devil. What about his duty to Cynthia?

Yes, that was true. He did have a certain duty to Cynthia. He couldn't forget her completely. No one who had ever lived fifteen years in the same house with Cynthia could ever completely forget her.

But she could get along. Trust Cynthia to get along. Was there anything else on earth he wanted? People on earth didn't know he existed. They had never paid the slightest attention to Hector Squinch. He was a nonentity. But here on Olympus he was important. Why, he couldn't tell. But he was. That was what mattered.

Hector faced the facts, met the summing up. There was nothing on earth to which he cared to return!

Wondering hazily if he had found Paradise, Hector Squinch fell peace-

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fully asleep.

TWO hours later, Bacchus shook him out of his slumber. The handsome young god had returned clad in a beautiful dark red toga, evidently Olympian evening wear. He was grinning broadly, as usual, and holding a newspaper in his hand.

"Hello," said Hector pleasantly. "I must have dozed off. What time is it?"

"Time to start the evening," Bacchus replied. Then he threw the newspaper into Hector's lap. "They certainly gave you a lot of ink."

Puzzled, Hector glanced over the front page. There was his picture plastered beneath the top headline. Then his eyes popped wide at the screaming black type on the streamer, reading, "CHAMP FROM MARS ARRIVES FOR TILT WITH ACHILLES!"

For a moment Hector was stupefied. He read the headline over again. Then he reread it. His lips moved silently over it a third time, his veins rapidly filling with ice as a premonition of what it all meant crept up his spine.

He, Hector Squinch, was labeled as the "Champ From Mars!"

Bacchus was still grinning. "Sorry your identity had to get out so soon. But one of the newshounds pumped Jove. Your arrival was expected, more or less, for the past two weeks anyhow."

Hector didn't know what to say. He turned back to the paper, reading the news story with mingled amazement and horror.

In accordance with the time honored policy of settling interplanetary disputes in the prize ring, Olympus today welcomed a gladiator from Mars who has come to battle the local champion, Achilles, in the centuries-old rivalry between Mars and Olympus.

The representative chosen by Mars, traveling incognito under the absurd pseudonym of Hector Squinch, arrived at noon and was rushed immediately to the city hall, where he was formally greeted by Jove and other local dignitaries.

Slugger Squinch, "The Martian Mauler" as he has already been dubbed by advance notices, will take quarters immediately in the Acropolis Hotel, where a twenty room suite has been engaged for him.

Achilles, when asked for a statement concerning his first impression of "The Martian Mauler," was terse but serene.

"Too bad he has to be immortal," said Achilles, "The Axe," "he looks like a cinch to murder."

Although Slugger Squinch is far from formidable in appearance, local sports authorities are not in the least deceived. They are certain that he must have something on the ball, else he would never have been selected by Mars to represent that planet in the interplanetary championship bout.

Hector finished the article, letting the paper slide from his nerveless grasp. His brain was whirling madly. So that was why he had been received with such fanfare! Hector "S l u g g e r" Squinch!

The little man shuddered violently. This was awful. This was incredible. This was terrible. It had to be set right, set right immediately!

He opened his mouth to speak to Bacchus, but it was almost a minute before the words would come. They were cracked, shaky, when they did.

"Look," said Hector in a half-bleat, "we have to get this straightened out immediately. I am *not* 'The Martian Mauler.' There has been a mistake. A grave mistake. I might say there has been a horrible mistake. I have never been to Mars in my life. I am Hector Squinch, formerly of the U.S.A.!"

Bacchus grinned tolerantly. "I can never understand you Martians. You always insist on going around under assumed names, hiding every movement in deepest secrecy. That's what your fighter said three years ago. Told us he

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was from Juno, can you imagine that?

"I can see the psychology of it, however. Mars knows that if his fighter gets licked incognito, he can always swear he never sent a fighter. But the first time one of his incognito battlers wins, just watch him claim victory!"

Bacchus laughed pleasantly, as though sharing a good joke. "Okay, Martian Mauler. Have it any way you want. If it makes you feel any better I'll tell people to pretend that they don't see through your disguise."

Something in the tone of his voice, something in the way he stood there grinning, convinced Hector that he would never be able to make Bacchus believe he was anyone but the Martian Mauler. Hector sighed. His breath trembled with despair.

"Come on," said Bacchus. "Let's get going."

"Where?" Hector inquired resignedly.

"Out and around the town," Bacchus declared with a vague wave of his hand. "You want to see the sights while you're still in one piece."

There was a queasy feeling in Hector's knees, cotton in his mouth, as he replied.

"I . . . I'd rather not, if you don't mind. I don't feel very good. No. I don't feel very good at all. In fact I feel sick."

"Tush," admonished Bacchus. "I know just the thing to fix you up."

So saying, he seized Hector Squinch by the arm, propelling him easily from the room. Pushing the elevator button, Bacchus turned to wink knowingly at his charge.

"We'll hit the high spots," he promised.

WHEN Bacchus declared they'd hit the high spots he was guilty only of understatement. Hector Squinch knew of night clubs, knew of them from the picture weeklies back in the U.S. But he wasn't ready for the Olympian brand.

The Centaur Club, their first stop, was all the famous night spots of the world rolled into one. It was colossal, packed to the ceiling with wildly celebrating Olympian socialites. They were led to a table near the dance floor, near the excellent rhumba band.

Suddenly a voice spoke from behind their table. It was a high, nasal, querulous voice, and Hector turned to face the speaker.

"Hello, Bach," the voice repeated. "Introduce me to the new celebrity."

Bacchus was on his feet instantly, his face wreathed in a wide grin.

"Mercury!" he exclaimed. "You old son-of-a-gun." His hand slapped the startled Hector on the back.

"Meet Hector Squinch. Hector, meet Mercury!"

The nasal voiced young man removed his winged hat and stretched out a paw in cheerful greeting. He had a wide, cherubic face, spotted by a milky way of freckles and stopped by a tawny thatch of uncombed hair.

Glancing swiftly at his shoes, Hector was both surprised and relieved to see that, sure enough, Mercury was wearing winged sandals. Noticing his glance, Mercury grinned.

"Yeah," he said, "just the type of shoes I'm supposed to wear. Can't disappoint the public, y'know. But they're hellish when it comes to dancing."

With that, the young god took a seat next to Bacchus, waving an impatient hand at the waiter. He didn't give Bacchus, or Hector, a chance to say a word before he started chattering again.

"Here's luck, all right," he began. "All night, ever since I heard that you dropped in on Olympus, I've been

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worrying what sort of odds I can get on your scrap with Achilles. Now I'll have a chance to size you up personally. Never make a bet unless you know the dope, that's what I always say."

Bacchus broke in momentarily.

"Mercury is quite a gambler," he explained to Hector. "The races are his specialty, but he puts his notes down on any fairly sure prospect."

"Oh?" said Hector noncommittally, "oh?"

"Yeah," Mercury went on. "Just like Bacchus says, I know the dope before I place my bets. That's what I'm getting at now." He paused to wink confidentially at Hector. "Tell me frankly, old man, what do you think your chances with Achilles will be?"

Hector paled. Momentarily he had been able to forget Achilles, and now the mention of the name was enough to give him another queasy feeling in the pit of his stomach.

"Please," he began, "don't wager anything on my . . . ah . . . er . . . battle with Achilles. That is, I mean, don't bet on *me*."

Bacchus winked broadly at Mercury.

"He's modest," he said by way of explanation.

"Oh! Heh — heh — heh." Mercury laughed metallically. "Why, of course. That's right. I forgot. Like the papers say, he's modest." He lapsed into a disappointed silence.

SOMETHING inside Hector's mind was insisting that he scream out to these odd young men. Scream out the truth. Tell them that he wasn't planning to fight anyone, let alone the most powerful god on Olympus. Something else wouldn't let him speak. He held his tongue, and a moment later the waiter came up to their table bearing a tray of slim stemmed cocktails.

"What," asked Hector when one of the glasses had been set before him, "is this?"

"A drink, of course," Bacchus frowned. "What does it look like?"

Hector remembered that Cynthia had never approved of him drinking, even if he had ever had the chance. He felt embarrassed, uneasy, and a little frightened. Hector had never tasted anything alcoholic before.

"Is, is it alcoholic?" Hector stammered.

He saw Mercury look sharply at Bacchus, and Bacchus returned the glance with one to equal it. They both turned to Hector.

"That's good," Bacchus chortled. "Capital. Very funny. Of course not. Ha—ha—ha. Drink it, pal."

Hector did as he was commanded, hurrying himself because of the imperative glances that the two young gods fixed upon him. Although he almost choked on the too great quantity of liquid trying to pass down his throat in one swallow, the stuff tasted like nothing he had ever experienced before in his life.

It tasted heavenly. That was the only word he could think of. Sweet, cool, fresh, splendid. And heavenly. He said so.

"That, that was heavenly!" Hector declared in amazement. "What was it?"

"Nectar," Mercury replied. "It's all we serve up here."

"Actual, honest-to-goodness nectar of the gods?" breathed Hector, who was already beginning to feel a strange glow about him.

"That's right," said Bacchus. "Made in my very own distillery. I control the liquor rackets up here."

The waiter reappeared, placed more glasses before the trio. "Try another," ordered Bacchus with pride in his voice. "Each tastes better than the last."

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Bacchus, Hector, and Mercury raised their glasses as one, draining them in a gulp.

Hector noted, with pride, that he didn't choke on the second. He also was beginning to realize the truth of Bacchus' boast. The second drink *did* taste better than the first—an apparently impossible feat.

Five drinks later, the seventh in all, Hector was vaguely aware that life seemed incredibly merry. Bacchus was laughing. Mercury was laughing. And Hector was laughing louder than either of them, and talking more, too. It was all very rosy, very splendid.

"Lesh ha' 'nother," Hector cried gaily.

The waiter brought the eighth.

Five minutes later the ninth had vanished down three eager throats.

At the fifteenth drink somebody was teaching somebody how to yodel. Hector, after peering owlishly around to see who was guilty of singing in public, realized that he himself was the yodeler. Bacchus and Mercury were his pupils.

"Yodellllleeeoooo," sang Hector.

"Yodellllllayyyyyyyhheeee," e c h o e d Bacchus.

"YodeleoleoleOoooo," Mercury finished.

THEY moved on, then, to another and even more pretentious night spot. How they arrived there, Hector wasn't exactly sure. But they found themselves at another table, in another club, in something less than fifteen minutes.

People were coming over to the table, and Hector was exceedingly busy — what with rising to say hello, sitting to gulp a nectar, and rising to say hello. He thought fuzzily that this was good. Exercise was just what Cynthia had always wanted him to have. He was getting plenty.

Some of the people who stopped at their table stayed to drink with them, and the waiter kept adding more and more chairs and tables to the group until finally it was comparable to a small banquet.

Hector was supremely happy. Mercury was his pal. Bacchus was his pal. People all listened while he sang. They seemed interested while he expounded thoroughly, if thickly, on third term ideas, tariff questions, and the rising price of corn.

Hector was happy. Happy as he had never been before in all his life. People liked him.

It was while he recited the "Shooting of Dan McGrew"—between glasses of nectar—that the sudden death-like silence fell over the table. Hector had gone on into the third verse before he realized anything was wrong. Then he stopped abruptly, reading something in the eyes of those at the table.

He turned. Looked in the direction in which the others gazed. A large, superbly muscled, animalish looking man was crossing the dance floor toward their table. Even loose toga lines failed to hide the lithe, incredible strength of the man. Hector heard a goddess whisper in hushed awe to her companion.

"Achilles," the goddess whispered.

And then Achilles was at the table, smiling crookedly down at the assembled revelers, looking at last at Hector, who stood, glass in hand, staring open mouthed at him.

"Hello, folks," Achilles purred. "Who's the lily standing there with the glass in his hand?"

"He's looking for trouble," Bacchus whispered hoarsely into Mercury's ear.

Hector felt the eyes of all assembled searching his face, as if waiting for him to handle the situation. He took a deep breath.

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"Who," he inquired of Bacchus, while pointing disdainfully at Achilles, "is this ugly ape?"

"Achilles," Bacchus muttered, "meet Hector. Hector, meet Achilles."

"Thug," said Hector weaving slightly and reaching for another drink. "He's as stupid a thug as it has ever been my acute displeasure to gaze upon."

Then, smirking happily at all present, Hector pointed a none too steady finger at Achilles again.

"I can hardly wait," he said loudly and fuzzily, "to get him into the ring with me."

ACHILLES, apparently possessed of even less intelligence than Hector gave him credit for, stood shocked and spluttering before them. He obviously didn't know quite what to make of it. Hector wasn't quailing. Yet he looked like a man born to quail.

The attention of the entire night club was now focused on their table. Even the orchestra had stopped playing. A dropping feather would have sounded like falling timber at that moment.

Then Bacchus was on his feet, grinning widely, applauding wildly.

"Atta boy, Hector. You'll mow him down." Turning to those at the table: "Three cheers for Hector!"

The group at the table responded with drunken enthusiasm, while the bewildered Achilles stood gaping stupidly at the scene. Hector, between effusive bows to the cheerers, gulped another glass of nectar and moved out from the table toward Achilles.

Hector held up his hands to silence the cheers, and when they had subsided he weaved tipsily for a moment before the mammoth, mighty-muscled god. He peered at Achilles intently, speaking at last.

"Correction," he said to Bacchus. "I'm not going to mow this gargantuan goon down—I'm going to murder him!"

More cheers rang in Hector's happy head, and he bowed so low, so enthusiastically, that he tipped over flat on his face. Bacchus helped him to his feet, pulled him back to the table while the cheering went on unabated.

Infuriated, bewildered, and thoroughly maddened, Achilles stamped away from the table, in cadence to the crying catcalls of all present.

"And furthermore," Hector screamed after him, "you're nothing but a no-good bum!"

Mercury was slapping him on the back, while the wild confusion continued.

"It's a cinch. Now I know who to put my notes on. It's a cinch. You're the guy who's gonna pin that big baboon's ears back for him. You'd never have had the nerve to tell him off, if you didn't have plenty on the ball!"

Bacchus banged loudly on the table with his palm. And when a half-silence was attained, he spoke loudly to all within hearing.

"Gods and goddesses," he began. "Olympus has at last found its savior. Our friend, Hector Squinch, will lead us from the wilderness into the golden era of pugilism we have so long desired. He will give Achilles the fight of his life!"

Hector, reaching for another drink, was pleased. But he was also puzzled. He spoke. "Whash thish?" he demanded.

"At last we will have the sort of sport we of Olympus have tried to get. We are betting on you, Hector Squinch, to win!"

Hector frowned. "Don't get it. Achilles is an Olympian. Supposed to fight for Olympus, supposed to lick me." He reached for another drink.

Bacchus was grinning. "*We* don't care who is champ, just so he is a *real* champ. If you win, it will give the fight

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world a new life. Achilles can always come back in a return match—if he's good enough to do it!"

Even through his fuzzy skull, Hector began to see the light. He nodded.

"You mean the game's been kinda off-color lately; fighters taking 'dives' and things like that?"

"That's it. Not that you could blame them. Mars has been sending a lot of palookas, and Achilles is quite a mountain. Nobody had the courage to stand up to him and slug. Why I remember one guy who pedaled around the ring for eleven rounds before Achilles managed to catch up with him.

"But we know *you'll* put up a fight. It'll bring public interest right back to the fight game with a bang!"

Hector rose unsteadily to his feet. "I am for you fine people here on Olympus. I'll lick Achilles if it's the last thing I do!" Then, quietly, with dignity and amid wild cheering, Hector passed out —utterly.

Bacchus was on his feet. "Three cheers for Hector Squinch," he cried loudly. "He's here to put the fight game back on its feet."

"Hip-hip, hooray!" the crowd responded.

"Hip-hip, hooray!" Mercury added.

"Hip-hip, hoooray!" Hector concluded, coming out of his coma for but an instant and passing out again a moment later.

WHEN Hector woke the following morning the sun already had climbed above his window ledge, revealing the fact that Mercury slept on one side of him and Bacchus on the other.

Hector felt his swollen head, running a thick tongue over his cottonish lips.

"Oooooh," Hector moaned.

It was enough to wake his sleeping companions.

"What's up?" said Mercury, waking with a start.

"Hector," Bacchus answered, sitting up also.

"How do you feel, pal?" they both inquired of the suffering Hector.

"Oooooh," Hector repeated. "Oooooh!"

"Gotta feel in shape," Mercury stated.

"Yeah, gotta fight tonight," Bacchus added. "Must be in shape to meet Achilles."

Sitting there in bed, head pillowed in his hands, Hector let the room stop spinning around. And as its giddy whirl subsided, he began to recall, with horrible remorse, the events of the previous evening. They were all there, in terrible clarity.

"I'm not going to fight anyone," Hector moaned.

"Don't be silly," Bacchus snapped. "Merc and I have put down wads on you. You can't fail us."

"No," Mercury agreed. "We're your friends. Can't fail your friends."

"Haven't enough time to train for it," Hector said in a desperate attempt to lie his way out.

"Train?" said Mercury.

"Train?" repeated Bacchus.

"Uhhuh," Hector replied, suspecting the worst.

"You don't train for fights up here. Nobody trains," Bacchus was explaining. "Besides, even if you wanted to train, wanted to break a sacred tradition among our dissipated pugilists, you wouldn't have time for it. You fight tonight."

"Tonight?" Hector's voice was a horrified squeak.

"Tonight," Mercury repeated firmly.

"Ohhhhhhh," said Hector Squinch, collapsing in a heap on his pillow.

"Don't let it worry you, pal," Bacchus reminded him. "It's gonna be a

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cinch, after the way you told Achilles off last night!"

"Ohhhhh," said Hector, who had been trying very hard to forget that incident. "And I was just beginning to enjoy it so up here!"

"Get some sleep," Mercury advised, "and you'll feel a lot better about the whole thing."

"Yes," agreed Bacchus, climbing out of bed. "Get some shut-eye. You'll be needing it when Achilles is chopping at you."

Then Mercury and Bacchus were gone.

AFTER an anguished half hour of tossing about in his bed, Hector forced himself to rise. He forced himself to dress, and forced himself to face himself in the mirror.

His head wasn't nearly as large as it felt at the moment. His tongue, when he extended it, didn't have nearly the thick covering of moss he suspected it had.

He noticed, however, the trembling in his hands as he tied his cravat. Noticed, and wondered if the trembling could be blamed on the night before or the night at hand.

"There won't be any night at hand," he told himself aloud. But even as his quavering voice split the silence, he knew that he lied to himself. There wasn't any way out of his predicament.

"I could run away," he thought desperately.

"But where?" the face in the mirror answered. "Where could you run to? Besides, Bacchus and Mercury are your pals. You've never had pals before. Pals don't let pals down. It just isn't done."

"But I'll be murdered," Hector told his reflection.

The reflection wiped away the start of a tear from a rheumy eye and answered, "You just can't let them down. They believe in you. No one has ever believed in you before. It's too late."

"Yes," Hector agreed with himself. "It's too late. There's nothing I can do."

Suddenly, from out of the gloom and dejection which hung about him like a shroud, there came a ray of hope. A faint, wan ray, but hope, nevertheless.

"The real Martian Mauler might appear in time to save me!" Both Hector and his reflection spoke as one.

Hector repeated the wish all day long. But as night came, he knew it was a futile thing. Bacchus called for him at seven.

They took a cab to the Colosseum, where the bout was to be held. Mercury, it seemed, had been delayed at the last minute. Something had come up. But he would get to the arena before the battle, Bacchus assured Hector cheerfully.

Several times during the journey Hector was on the verge of breaking down, of making a more or less hysterical confession to Bacchus, a plea that would save him from Achilles. But something held the little man back.

He was scared. Scared as hell, and jittery. Bacchus saw it in his every gesture. He commented on it, bewilderedly.

"What's up?" he asked. "Haven't got the jitters?"

Hector couldn't admit shame before Bacchus. Bacchus was a friend. Bacchus was a pal. They all were. He couldn't let them down. Somehow, he couldn't do it.

This was Hector's first opportunity in life to come through. And he was determined, with a fierce burning emotion, that he'd not fail them. Even if it killed him.

"Don't mind me," he said in a trembling falsetto. "I always seem fright-

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ened before a fight. It's just a nervous reaction. Makes me all the more like a killer when I climb into the ring."

"Oh," Bacchus said, his voice heavy with relief.

They lapsed into silence for the rest of the journey.

In the dressing room of the Colosseum, Hector was herded over to a locker by three stalwart bald-headed attendants. There his clothes were swiftly removed from him, and a loin cloth substituted instead. It was a gaudy affair, made of some silky substance, and striped with horrible orange and purple lines.

Bacchus, Hector was relieved to note, had gone to take care of the details of the match.

Then, when his feet had been shod in the many-thonged Grecian sandals that were thrust upon him, Hector stood up. The attendants, who hadn't been particularly noticing his physical dimensions previously, stepped back aghast.

"Wow," ejaculated one of the three bald-heads, "look at th' phizzick on the punk!"

HECTOR blushed, painfully conscious of his washboard ribs, toothpick arms, pale, hairless body, and thin, knock-kneed legs. He was acutely aware that he was not at his best in such attire. The loin cloth had been tailored for a chap twice as large as himself, and hung dejectedly from his scrawny body —as though ashamed of the wearer.

By now the bald-heads were bent in gales of laughter. Loud uncontrollable, painfully embarrassing derision rent the dressing room. Head bowed, crimson cheeked beneath the scorn of the attendants, Hector thought bitterly that execution was bad enough, but such a shameful execution was almost past bearing.

Bacchus entered the room, and the bald-heads fled in rapid confusion before his icy glare.

"Well," said Bacchus, looking long and thoughtfully at Hector. "Well, well!"

"Hello," said Hector Squinch.

Bacchus, not being the dullest of gods, perceived the shame that poured forth from the little man's eyes. He decided to take a stab at cheering him up.

"Well, anyway, no one can accuse us of having fattened you for the kill."

The words had the opposite effect on Hector from that which Bacchus had intended. He shuddered violently, remembering the gigantic, bone-crushing stature of Achilles. Nevertheless, he bit his lip. He was determined Bacchus should think him nervous rather than afraid.

"Remember," chattered Hector, "I'm always this way just before a fight."

"Buck up," pleaded Bacchus. "What's it matter? Brains are what count, little fellow, not brawn."

Hector said nothing, but the expression on his face indicated that he refused to be consoled. He put his hands behind his back and began to pace back and forth very dramatically—a gesture that lost its drama when he tripped himself up on his oversized sandals.

Bacchus helped him to his feet.

"Come on. You're to go on in five minutes. We might as well get started. The preliminary matches are just about over."

The roar of the mob gathered in the Colosseum drifted down to the dressing room corridors, loud to their ears. Yes, the last bout before Hector's was apparently ending in wild excitement.

Bacchus found a cloak which he draped over Hector's thin shoulders, giving the little man some respite from the embarrassment he felt.

"There now," Bacchus said. "The

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cloak will keep you warm. Don't let all this get you down. It won't last long."

"Which," said Hector starting out of the dressing room, "is about as pretty an exit line as I've ever heard."

AS they walked down the long tunnel-like corridor leading to the arena, Hector paled, the noise of the crowd becoming bedlam, growing louder and louder while they approached.

Then, suddenly, the noise subsided. All was quiet for an instant, then a hoarse, frenzied screaming broke from thousands of throats. Hector stopped dead in his tracks.

"What," he muttered thickly, "has happened?"

Bacchus shrugged amiably. "Just the end of the last preliminary fight, I guess."

Less than two minutes later, when they were nearing the opening that led into the arena, Hector observed a panorama that proved the accuracy of Bacchus' guess.

Four trainers, carrying a body awkwardly down the aisle of the arena, were approaching. As they entered the tunnel, Hector and Bacchus were forced to step to one side. The two caught a glimpse of the fighter being carted back to the dressing room.

One look at the bloody, twisted, pulverized features of the gladiator was enough for Hector. He grabbed tightly to Bacchus' arm. Grabbed tightly to keep from fainting.

Emerging from the tunnel opening into the brightly lighted arena, Hector and Bacchus were met with a swift and spontaneous burst of cheering. Somehow, as they walked down the aisle to the ring, Hector felt less lonely, a little warmer.

Bacchus, grinning, clapped him on the back. "That's for you. The crowd likes you, Hector."

"Like me in the all-concealing raiment," Hector corrected him. "Wait until I have to remove it for the battle."

Then they were at the ringside, climbing the steps. There were many men there, officials, reporters, photographers, guards, but Hector was too dazed to notice any of them.

Someone was pushing him into a corner. He looked up wildly to see that it was Bacchus, still wearing his perpetual grin, saying words that Hector couldn't catch above the roar of the crowd and the pounding of his heart. He knew it didn't make any difference. Nothing that anyone said would make any difference now.

His vision focused more clearly as he calmed somewhat, and he looked swiftly across the ring, to the opposite corner, to see if Achilles had arrived yet. The Killer Giant of Olympus was not yet in the ring. But Hector's relief was momentary, for he knew Achilles could be depended upon to arrive at any instant.

Not less than ten seconds later, bedlam let loose over the packed Colosseum. Achilles was making his triumphal entry into the arena. Somewhere in the gallery, a band struck up *Entrance of The Gladiators* and the tune brought nostalgic pangs to Hector. It was the air they had played when he, as a kid in Iowa, watched the circus entertainers parade into the Big Tent.

But this was no chorus. This was Achilles.

HECTOR glimpsed his shaven skull gleaming under the huge lights, bobbing down the aisle toward the ring. There were rows and rows of handlers following the massive giant, reaching out to pat him on the back, shouting loud encouragement.

Achilles grinned cockily at all this, waving clasped hands above his head,

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nodding, bowing, flexing his tremendous muscles for the adulation of the multitude.

Hector winced, trying to draw his eyes from the fascinating animal grace of his opponent.

Then Achilles was climbing into the ring, moving panther-like around it, waving to his backers, smiling with his big yellow dog teeth. Men were clearing the ring until at last Achilles took his position in the corner opposite Hector, and there was no one left in the squared canvas except the gladiators, the referee, and an announcer.

Bacchus stopped grinning. A frown creased his forehead.

"Can't understand what's happened to Mercury," he muttered.

A hush fell over the arena while the referee stepped to the center of the ring and held his hands aloft for silence.

"Layyyyyydeeeze and Gemp'men," he roared. "We are here tonight to see the interplanetary rough-and-tumble champeenship!" He looked at Hector. "We hope," he added, dubiously.

The outburst that followed took a full ten minutes to quell. Men shouted, women screamed, children yelped, and the Colosseum went mad.

At last the referee was moving toward Hector, who was still clutching frantically to his cloak. The referee pointed a finger at him, then grabbed one of his hands.

"In dis corner we got the representatiff from Mars." Cheers. "One Slugger Squinch, de Martian Mauler!" Good natured laughter and more enthusiastic cheers.

Bursts of additional cheering carried on for several minutes, indicating that there are always people willing to champion the underdog.

"Squinch weighs," the referee began, then looked quizzically at Hector. "Squinch weighs," he began again. Then, disgusted, "Oh, well, folks. It don't make no difference *wot* his weight is." He looked curiously at Hector, shook his head again, as if troubled by grave doubts.

Then he strode across the ring to the corner occupied by Achilles. Stopping within three feet of the muscular giant, he pointed his finger dramatically.

"An' in dis corner," he paused for emphasis, "in dis corner we got the champeen of da woild, universe, an' incidental solar systems, Achilles—da Axe!"

THE volume of sound that split the silence was deafening, pouring down on the ring from every corner of the arena.

Achilles danced nimbly to the center of the ring, holding his hands clasped aloft and grinning—like a wolf before the kill.

Hector made for the ropes and tried to crawl through them to the safety of the aisle. He wanted to leave, rapidly.

Bacchus, however, seized him gently but firmly by the collar of his oversized cloak, forcing him back on his stool.

"Be calm," ordered Bacchus. "This could be worse."

"How?" Hector inquired logically enough.

A hush that was as terrifying as it was sudden, fell over the arena. Hector, heart hammering furiously against his thin chest, knew that the battle was about to start. Bacchus was tugging at the cloak around his shoulders, and before he could prevent it, Hector felt it slide free—leaving him in his much-too-big loin cloth and absurdly large sandals.

"I don't have to give you any advice," Bacchus was speaking rapidly into Hector's ear. "You ought to be able to size him up in a round. Then you can get to work on him. Don't for-

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get, it's rough-and-tumble. No holds are barred. Good luck, pal!"

The bell clanged simultaneously with the movement of Hector's stool being jerked from under him. He was forced to hang to the ropes until strength returned to his knees.

Achilles, the man-eating, giant-killing Achilles, was advancing across the ring toward him. The fight was on!

The fight was on. Achilles was moving down on him. And Hector was as yet unable to move a muscle. The little man was paralyzed by fear!

The screams of the crowd had settled to a dull unnoticed din in his ears, had become merely a background. Achilles was less than five feet away, but advancing cautiously toward him—a little bit wary of the man who had nerve enough to tell him off just the night before.

Achilles, three feet from Hector, gathered himself for the spring. The screams of the crowd were ear-splitting. And still the little man in the absurdly oversized toga didn't move.

It happened as one motion. Achilles leaped, launching his gargantuan hulk through the air, covering the remaining distance to Hector. It happened at the same instant that Hector's knees gave out completely and he sagged to the floor.

The crowd went mad. Hector could hear them going mad as he lay there on the canvas wondering why he was still unharmed.

Opening his eyes he saw the reason.

HIS swoon had been as perfectly timed as a swift ducking under the leap might have been—and Achilles had hurtled past him. Hurtled past him and out through the ropes of the ring, into the press row!

The referee was counting, for Achilles, who was still trying to clamber back into the ring. Hector, somehow, had risen weakly to his feet, was backing toward the other end of the ring, staring at his gigantic opponent with unconcealed amazement.

Then, for but a second, the din of the crowd registered on Hector's consciousness once again. They were cheering. They were cheering for him. They were cheering for Hector Squinch. Slugger Squinch!

Hector's eyes were misty, and his knees grew strong again. But his soul was stronger. The cheers of the crowd had given strength to the absurd little gladiator.

Hector spit on his hands.

The crowd roared.

Hector beckoned to Achilles, laughed at him, beckoned once more. The crowd went crazy.

In the back of Hector's mind there was a thought. A small but terribly important thought. It concerned a legend—about Achilles' heel. He wondered why he had never remembered it until this moment. Achilles was tough. But he was a sucker for a tap on the heel!

His plan was straight in his mind as he saw Achilles climb back into the ring, bellowing with rage, and advance upon him. Hector knew he wouldn't have the strength to go after the heel tooth and nail. He remembered the Japanese. Win by yielding.

He would yield. He would let Achilles bounce him around a bit, working to get his hands on that heel!

Achilles rushed. Hector, like the first of the ancient martyrs, stepped forth to meet him.

The next few minutes were impossible agony. Three times Achilles lifted Hector's frail body into the air. Three times he sent it smashing to the canvas. At last he fell full length on the little man—the little man who was bleeding

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from ears and nose, but whose battered mouth was smiling.

Achilles reached for a leg-lock on Hector, which put Achilles' legs in position before Hector's face. This was it!

The pain was unbearable, but somehow Hector fought off the swimming nausea that seemed to cloud his brain. He had to get that heel. Had to get it before he passed out.

His small hands clutched around the giant's ankle, drew the foot toward him. Brought the foot to his face. Hector bared his teeth. He was going to bite that heel as it had never been bitten before.

But even as he saw the foot, Hector paled. Both of Achilles' sandals were made with thick copper plates to protect his heels!

Blackness descended on Hector. Somewhere in the distance he heard a gong ringing, loudly.

BACCHUS was talking, and Hector was back on his stool.

"Good work," Bacchus said. "You almost had him, if you hadn't gone unconscious. Wear him out. Dodge the brute. Like you did at the start. You're a master at that technique. Capitalize on it. Don't tussle with him."

"What about his heel?" Hector said, pushing the ammonia bottle away from his nose. "I have to get his heel."

"Forget his heels," Bacchus advised. "He's kept them well protected for centuries, ever since he lost a decision on one of them. That's an old gag. He's wise to it."

Hector was silent. But he knew that, somehow, he had to get Achilles's heel plate off. It was his only chance. He wasn't a master dodger. He'd been lucky when he swooned. Bacchus didn't know that.

Then the gong rang again, and the comforting stool was jerked from beneath Hector. Another round. The bell had saved him in the last one. If he didn't get that heel plate off, nothing would save him in this one.

Never in his life had Hector been so spent, so utterly weary. He wasn't a strong man to begin with. And Achilles had put him through every conceivable torture. He couldn't stand much more, Hector knew. This would be his last effort.

But first he would need a few seconds more of rest. He watched Achilles moving confidently in on him. Then he darted to the other side of the lumbering giant.

With a bellow of rage, Achilles turned, making for him again. Hector artfully skipped around him once more.

The crowd screamed.

Hector ran, and continued to run, in spite of the rage that Achilles thundered after him, in spite of the fact that the noise from the crowd was beginning to be sprinkled with boos.

He faced Achilles at last. Savagely, the huge Olympian rushed in on him, lifted him shoulder high. Hector winced, as he felt the canvas smashing up at him. But it was going to be worth it. It had to be.

They were down again, and through the maze of pain that racked his brain and body, Hector knew that Achilles was atop him once more, in the same position as before.

Hector grabbed the foot. But he didn't bother with the heel. It was the sandal he was after. The heel plates were attached to the sandal. Remove the sandal and you had the heel.

Hector worked feverishly on the sandal lacings. Achilles, busily engaged in tying Hector's own legs into pretzels, apparently didn't notice him.

The crowd had evidently sensed Hector's objective, for they were screaming frenziedly. He couldn't dis-

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tinguish what the crowd was saying, for blackness was slipping over him once more. He fought it off. He had to keep conscious. The sandal was almost off.

At last, the sandal came loose in his hand!

Hector wasted no time. He brought the bare heel of Achilles up to his face. Furiously, he sunk his teeth into that heel. Achilles, if the legend was true, would collapse!

But Achilles didn't. He kept right on tying Hector's legs into pretzels. And as Hector glanced at Achilles other sandal, the one he hadn't removed, he saw a tiny lock at the top of the lacings.

Despair flooded the very soul of Hector Squinch. He knew now what the crowd had been trying to tell him. He'd been working on the wrong heel!

A cloud of blackness rushed over Hector again.

HE was on his stool. Two people were talking. One was Mercury, the other, of course, Bacchus. Mercury must have arrived.

"Is it all over?" Hector murmured through bloody lips.

"No. You were in luck, pal," Mercury was saying. "Saved by the bell again."

"Saved," Hector said bitterly. "Saved!"

"Don't talk," Bacchus advised him. Then Mercury placed something to his lips. It was nectar. Hector swallowed great gulps of the refreshing stuff. He drank the whole bottleful. He reeled in his seat.

The bell rang again. The stool was gone. Somehow he was on his feet once more. But he was through. Hector knew he was through. He'd never have a chance to get that other sandal off, even if he were able to open the lock. But he laughed happily. He felt like bouncing. He felt like flying. He spread his arms like wings.

Hector saw Achilles lunging at him. Hector grinned and waited. Best to get it over with quickly while he was happy.

Achilles seized him about the waist, lifted him high, slammed him down to the canvas.

Hector bounced up like a streak! He got dizzy when he stayed down!

Hector was "out on his feet" in any man's language. But an inner exhilaration was still forcing him up from the canvas every time Achilles downed him. He felt no pain, and he rather liked the bouncing.

Hector lost track of the number of times in the past seven rounds that Achilles had bounced him to the canvas. Maybe a hundred. Maybe two hundred. What did it matter, he couldn't feel it.

The crowd was hysterical. Never had they seen such courage, never had they suspected that the beaten, bloody, tortured little absurdity in the ring had such guts. It was incredible. He refused to be downed!

Achilles was wearying. Smashing a man to the canvas can become terribly monotonous. Especially if he keeps getting up, when by all the laws of God and man he should stay down.

But Achilles, weary as he was, was not to be daunted. He resolved to try again.

Disinterestedly Hector watched the big fellow moving across the ring toward him, felt again those massive hands lifting his bruised and battered body high into the air.

He crashed to the canvas. The jarring almost ripped him apart. Something tinkled beside him.

Hector's outstretched hand closed around a metal plate.

And then Hector sobered. He felt wracked with pain. He was being killed! The nectar Mercury had given him had

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dulled his senses. But now, he could feel again. Once more would kill him—he knew it!

Achilles dropped to his knees beside the prostrate Hector, grinning wolfishly to see that the little man was apparently down for good this time.

And something clicked in Hector's brain. In his hand was a copper plate! Achilles heel plate!

Hector turned himself over painfully, reached desperately with his closed hand for Mercury's sandal. The big man laughed at his absurd efforts to reach the heel. Even extended it mockingly.

Hector grabbed it and bit—deep—with all his last remaining strength.

And Achilles, the Axe, the Killer, the Great, howled with pain!

The crowd which had become hushed in an awed tribute to the last stand of Hector Squinch, heard that bellow. Heard that bellow of pain and rose to its feet shouting madly.

Hector had Achilles on the run!

The gigantic battler was on his feet, or one foot, for he was hopping along holding his heel, screaming. Hector dragged himself up from the canvas by sheer will power, setting out after his massive opponent.

Achilles wasn't used to hopping about on one foot. And when he fell sprawling to the canvas a moment later, Hector threw himself upon the giant, sank his teeth once more into the heel.

Achilles passed out cold!

Hector teetered to his feet, smiling foggily at the screaming, maddened crowd. The referee was holding his hand aloft. People were swarming into the ring, lifting him to their shoulders.

Then Hector, too, passed out completely.

THE long tables were crowded with brilliantly attired people. Hector had lost the first self-consciousness he felt with the opening speeches in his honor. Jove was talking now.

"And we wish to welcome dear Hector Squinch a second time. Not as a visitor, but as a brother and permanent resident of Olympus. As Mayor of this planet I can heartily say that all of us here are honored to have such a chap in our midst."

Loud cheers, clacking of knives on table tops.

Tears ran unashamed down the cheeks of Hector Squinch. He smiled warmly at Mercury who sat on his right, and Bacchus who occupied the seat to the left of him. He, Hector Squinch, had found his place in the world. Well, maybe not in the world, exactly, but in the cosmos, anyway.

Jove was about to continue when there was a sudden interruption at the far end of the banquet hall. A voice was heard, ringing stridently.

"I'm sorry, I have to get in," said the voice.

Jove looked up.

"Who is it?" he bellowed.

There was a flurry, and a tall, thin old man with a wrinkled face and kindly eyes, dressed in a toga and carrying a staff, entered.

"Charon," the name exploded from Jove's lips.

"What brings you here, Charon?" someone shouted.

The old man advanced to the side of Jove.

"There is an alien in our midst," he announced.

"Charon is the immigration boss on the river Styx," Mercury whispered into Hector's ear.

Then Charon was pointing a gnarled finger at Hector.

"You, sir. Are you Hector Squinch?"

Hector rose, an awful premonition clutching at his heart.

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"Yes," he gulped. "Yes, I am."

"I'm sorry," said Charon, and Hector felt sure the old man was sincere. "But you'll have to come with me. Achilles insisted that I look you up. I had to do it. Found out you aren't from Mars. Found out you're from Earth, from the United States. I found out you aren't even immortal!"

There was a gasp from the assemblage, a gasp of shock, sorrow, and surprise.

Jove looked at Hector.

"Is this true, Heck?"

"Yes," Hector admitted, voice choking. "I'm afraid it is."

CHARON reached into his toga and was holding a sheaf of papers.

"I'm sorry," he said fumbling apologetically with his papers, "but the law says you'll have to leave, now, with me. Only immortals have a place on Olympus. Can't do anything about the law. You haven't died yet, y'know, so you can't be immortal."

"This is outrageous!" Jove bellowed. "Heck is an all right guy. I'll vouch for him!"

Charon shook his aged head.

"Sorry, Jove, but you know the law as well as I do."

Jove fell silent, a huge tear trickling down his face onto his black beard.

The bottom had fallen out for Hector.

In the space of twenty-four hours he had held utter happiness in his hands. And now it was gone. He had to leave. Had to return to Earth, to Cynthia, to a mad, stupid, heartless world—where people hated, and thieved, and fought among themselves. A world that had no place for Hector Squinches.

His eyes were affected with a dimness that made the room seem to swim before him. Faces looked up sympathetically at him from the long banquet tables. Faces of friends, people who liked him for what he was, and loved him for what he wasn't.

His voice, when he turned to Charon, was husky, off-key.

"I guess you're right," he conceded. "I'm not an immortal. Just a Squinch, a Hector Squinch, at that. I'd better be going with you."

He turned, then, and made his way slowly along the banquet hall, shaking hands with the friends he might never see again.

"I'll save you some nectar," Bacchus said huskily.

"When you come back, I'll give you some sure bets," Mercury promised him, then turned to hide his watery eyes.

"Don't worry," said Jove. "I've got some influence. I'll do all I can."

He was at the door, waving to them all for the last time, when voices broke forth, led by the faltering basso of Jove.

"For he's a jolly good fellow, for he's a jolly good fellow. For he's a jolly good fellooooooooow, which nobody can deny!"

HECTOR SQUINCH blinked back the tears and walked slowly from the room. Charon, staff in hand, followed mournfully behind him.

They were at the Styx, pausing on the bank, for one last look at Olympus. Hector turned to Charon.

"It's been fine," he said softly. "More than fine." A moment of silence, then, "I don't suppose I'll ever see it again."

"When you die," Charon reminded him, "they'll get you back here. Jove has influence."

"Jove. Good old pompous blustering well-meaning Jove." Hector smiled in remembrance.

"He is a bit of an ass, isn't he?" Charon agreed clumsily.

"But you couldn't want a better Mayor." They both spoke the words at

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the same instant, stopped short, then smiled. Charon extended his hand.

"Don't usually fraternize with my passengers but I want to say goodbye to you. I couldn't help what happened. Forgive it."

"I know," Hector nodded in understanding. Then he stepped into the little boat at the bank.

"Think you can make it alone?" Charon asked.

"Yes, I think I can make it alone."

Then the boat was drifting out on the current, toward a whirlpool in the center of the stream. Charon, standing on the bank, waved once in final farewell. Hector replied. A moment later the craft was sucked into the whirlpool.

Everything was enveloped in darkness . . . roaring filled his ears . . . sparks and dancing visions . . hands reaching out . . . more noise and confusion . . . falling . . . falling through space . . . endlessly . . . then a brilliant flashing searching light.

Hector was standing. He could feel the ground beneath his feet. It was solid, cement, a sidewalk. Hector opened his eyes against a brilliant sun. Traffic roared past him, trucks, busses, taxies, private limousines. He was on the corner of Times Square. The sign above his head told him as much.

Back on Earth!

Funny. It was so simple. A minute before he'd been on Olympus. And now he was at Times Square. With trucks dashing past, and busses. Hector knew what had to be done. There wasn't any sense in wasting time.

He lighted a cigarette unhurriedly, deliberately. For a moment he dragged deep on it—this little man whose soul had grown out of proportion to his body.

Then he smiled, quite happily.

"Now let's see what sort of influence Jove can muster in my behalf," he said aloud. He stepped out into the traffic.

He stood directly in the path of a speeding truck.

It was too late for the driver to apply his brakes. Hector knew it would be too late. But that was the way he wanted it to be.

THE GOLDEN PRINCESS

(Concluded from page 45)

"You little shrimp, button up your lip or I'll turn you over my knee and spank you," Slug growled.

"You try that and I'll cut you into goldfish food!"

Nick Hall heard the exchange of words. He smiled at Zelda.

"Captain Rommey is happy again," he said.

"Aren't we all?" she smiled back.

NICK HALL, with Raymond Garber removed from the scene, regained control of his business. He promptly supplied Professor Ross with funds to carry on his research. Ross is now trying to reopen the veil between the two worlds. As yet he has not succeeded. But he keeps trying. He knows that both Earth and the world of the Cro-Magnons will benefit if communication can be established.

Sometimes Nick Hall wonders what really happened after they were so unceremoniously thrown out of that strange world across the veil. Were Zorg and Garber really killed? Or did one or both of them possibly survive? And if they did . . . ?

There is but one way he will ever know. If he ever hears the drums again, he will know that he is being followed by the Wardens from the world of the Cro-Magnons.

He hopes he will never hear those drums again.

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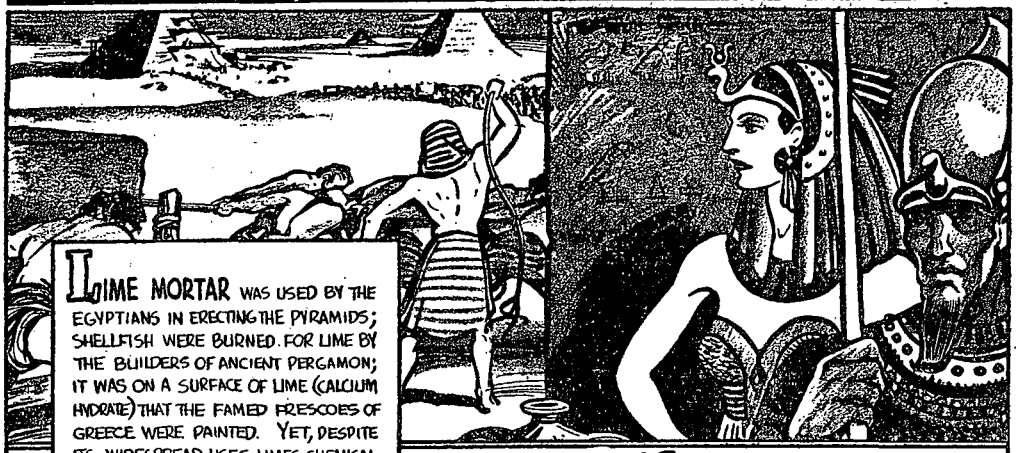
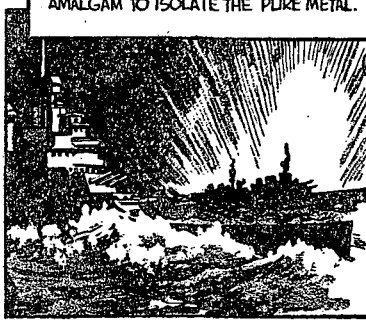
ROMANCE OF THE ELEMENTS..... Calcium

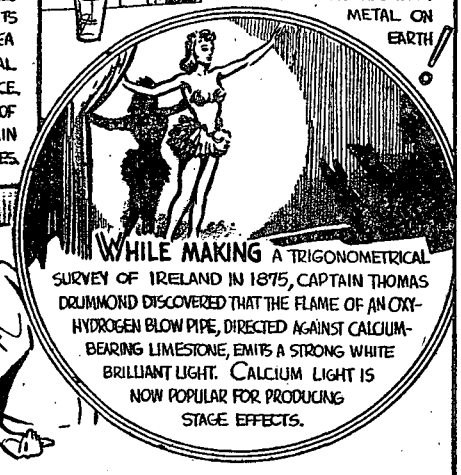


LIME MORTAR WAS USED BY THE EGYPTIANS IN ERECTING THE PYRAMIDS; SHELLFISH WERE BURNED FOR LIME BY THE BUILDERS OF ANCIENT PERGAMON; IT WAS ON A SURFACE OF LIME (CALCIUM HYDRATE) THAT THE FAMED FRESCOES OF GREECE WERE PAINTED. YET, DESPITE ITS WIDESPREAD USES, LIMES CHEMICAL NATURE WAS A TOTAL MYSTERY TO THE ANCIENTS! IT WAS NOT UNTIL 1808 THAT DAVY OF ENGLAND, AFTER REPEATED EXPERIMENTS, OBTAINED FROM LIME SUFFICIENT CALCIUM AMALGAM TO ISOLATE THE PURE METAL.



CALCIUM PHOSPHIDE, DROPPED IN WATER FLARES INSTANTLY; LIGHTS UP TARGETS AT SEA FOR NIGHT NAVAL GUNNERY PRACTICE. THE PHOSPHATE OF CALCIUM IS THE MAIN CONSTITUENT OF BONES.

CALCIUM ACCOUNTS FOR ONLY 2% OF A MAN'S WEIGHT—YET IT IS AN ELEMENT ESSENTIAL TO BONES, TEETH AND BLOOD. EVEN AMOEBAS CAN'T EXIST WITH CALCIUM IN THEIR CELLS! CHEESE AND MILK ARE TOPS AS FOOD SOURCES OF CALCIUM. NEXT TO ALUMINUM AND IRON, CALCIUM IS THE MOST ABUNDANT METAL ON EARTH!



WHILE MAKING A TRIGONOMETRICAL SURVEY OF IRELAND IN 1875, CAPTAIN THOMAS DRUMMOND DISCOVERED THAT THE FLAME OF AN OXY-HYDROGEN BLOW PIPE, DIRECTED AGAINST CALCIUM-BEARING LIMESTONE, EMITS A STRONG WHITE BRILLIANT LIGHT. CALCIUM LIGHT IS NOW POPULAR FOR PRODUCING STAGE EFFECTS.

PHYSICIANS FOUND RECENTLY THAT CALCIUM CHLORIDE, INJECTED INTO VEINS, GIVES RAPID RELIEF FROM LEAD COLIC POISONING; INCREASED CALCIUM RETENTION REMOVES THE LEAD FROM THE BLOOD, STORES IT IN THE BONES. CALCIUM CHLORIDE IS TRULY A JACK OF ALL TRADES. KEEPS DOWN THE DUST WHEN SPRINKLED ON DIRT ROADS. 3% OF IT ADDED TO PORTLAND CEMENT MAKES WORK POSSIBLE IN FREEZING WEATHER. CALCIUM CHLORIDE IS USED IN FREEZING MIXTURES; TO PRESERVE MEAT; IN IMPREGNATING TEXTILES TO MAKE THEM FIRE PROOF.

CALCIUM is number 20 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Ca and its atomic weight is 40.07. Its density is 1.55 and its melting point is 810°. It belongs to the group of alkaline earth metals which include Strontium and Barium. Calcium is a silvery white metal. It is malleable and a little harder than lead. It is an active metal and is obtained in hydride form by heating the metal with hydrogen. It is a source of hydrogen for military purposes. It occurs very abundantly in limestone, marble, calcite, chalk, coral, shells, etc. Calcium imparts a brick-red color to a non-luminous flame. It is used in the making of mortar, concrete, cement, and gypsum. It is used as a flux, in making opaque glass, white enamel, hydrofluoric acid, etc.

Next Issue—The Romance of Carbon

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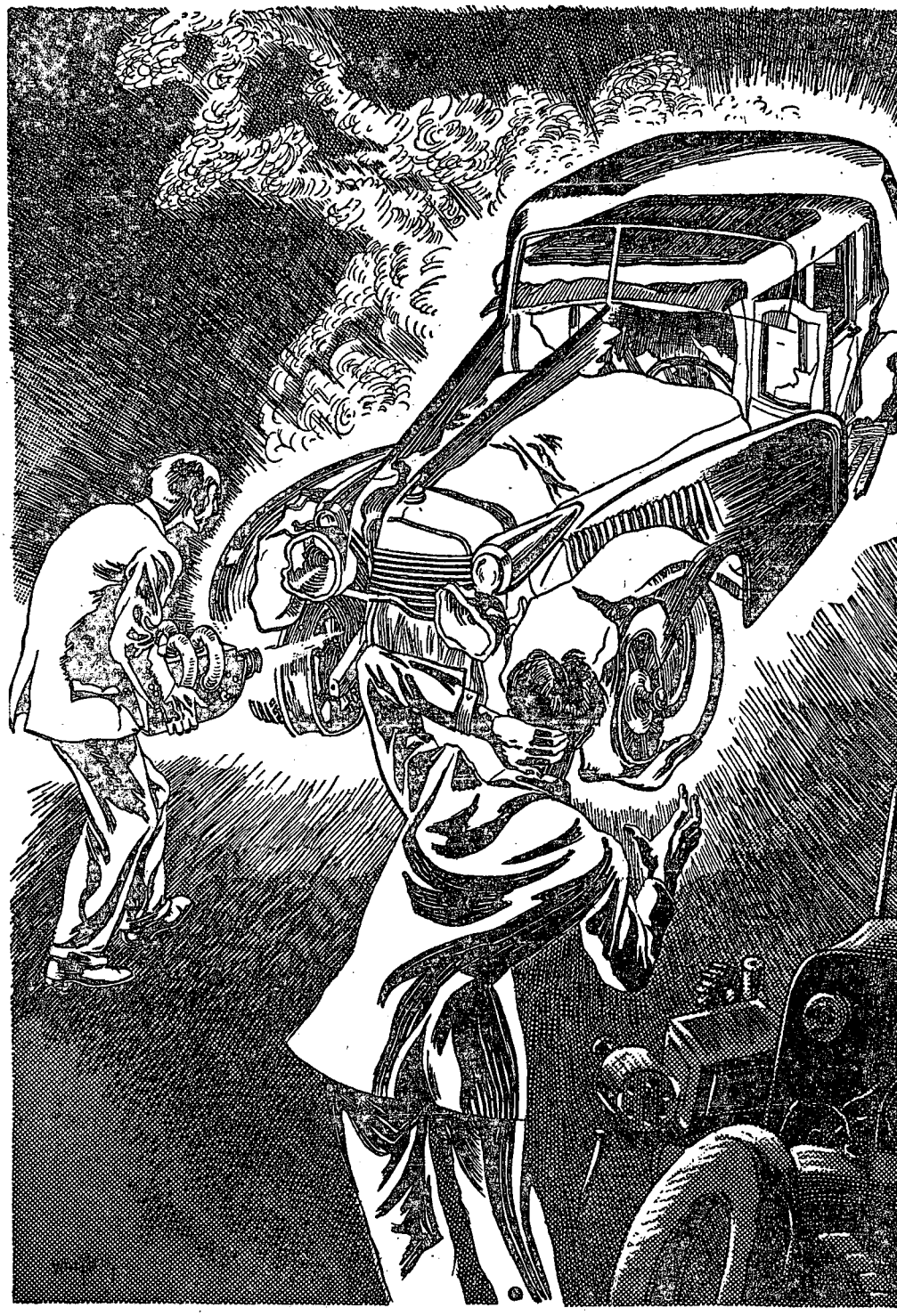

Father turned the ray on the old wreck and it began to tremble and shake wildly. A glow surrounded it and weird crackles came from it

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The RAY that FAILED

by Donald Bern

Not even the genie of Aladdin's lamp could do the things this strange atomic ray accomplished

I WAS reading in the paper how these four bandits held up the bank in Herrington, which is just a hundred miles from our town, when all of a sudden my father called me.

"Horace," he yelled, "come into the backyard!"

His voice was raised high with excitement, just like it always was when he'd invented something or other, so I knew I was in for another of those half hour lectures on how a pile of junk worked. I threw down the paper and unfolded my lanky frame from the couch upon which I had been comfortably reclining, and shuffled out of the back door into the yard.

"What is it now?" I inquired grumpily. Then I gasped.

There was a cigar-shaped contraption resting right in mother's flower garden. It was about four feet high and ten feet long, made of metal, and it had a lot of big pipes running from what was evidently the front of the thing to the rear. Father pointed at the contraption proudly as he looked at me.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked. The little white hairs on the top of his head moved gently in a slow breeze.

"First, tell me what it is," I begged.

"That's a space ship," father stated in a definite tone of voice.

I was absolutely flabbergasted. This was a little too much. No, this was a lot too much.

"Space ship!" I scoffed. "There aren't any yet! Anyway, where did you get this—this thing?"

Father pointed to a box at his feet. It was a black box of wooden construction, crowded with queerly shaped tubes and wires and spare parts. One end of the brainchild protruded slightly, giving it a kind of camera appearance.

Father said: "I made the space ship out of our old Buick." I kept my mouth shut. "You see," he continued, "this invention of mine gives out energy rays that infiltrate instantly into whatever object I point it at. Son, with this invention I can transform any object into any other sort of object I choose!"

I still kept my mouth shut.

"First I reflect the energy rays off a sketch or photograph of the thing I want to make. These rays bounce off the picture like gamma rays. When they hit a mass of material—that is to say, a complete atomic unit—they cause that object to assume the form and substance of the reflected picture!

"Instead of just an image being

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formed, as in the case of the projection of films on a silver screen, these streams of reflected energy 'bombard' the selected object into the exact likeness of the picture. Er—is that clear?"

"Father," I murmured, "I shan't follow in your footsteps."

There was a sort of sliding door on the freak space ship, and in half a second father had slipped inside. He turned some switches and a lot of fire and black smoke shot from the pipes. But the ship didn't do more than shudder a little. Finally, father stepped out.

"It doesn't work," he admitted sadly.

"No," I agreed. "It doesn't. But how about the Buick, Father? That worked and I need it tonight. I've got a date."

A gleam came into father's eyes.

"Son," he said slowly, "how would you like a 1940 Cadillac?"

I stared at him unbelieving. "We can't afford it," I stated finally.

FATHER bent over and reached into the magic box that had all the peculiarly shaped tubes. From it he drew out a small picture. It was a sketch of the space ship. He put it in his pocket; and from the same pocket he drew out another picture. It was a miniature photograph of the newest and swankiest Cadillac. Then, before my goggling eyes he inserted this into the box. He pointed the protruding camera end of the contraption at the "space ship," turned a switch and said,

"Watch!"

I watched. A minute passed; and then all of a sudden I noticed that the ship was losing its capsule shape. The body of the space machine was squirming around as though it were alive! Terrific waves of heat came from it, and almost animal grunts. One of those screwy metamorphoses was taking place! Three minutes later, a brand-new Cadillac rested where the space ship had stood! *

Wordlessly, I climbed inside and pushed the starter switch. The motor purred smoothly as it came to life. Father climbed in beside me and I drove around the block. Neighbors gaped at us. Father sat up straight and proud, and so did I. Father chuckled:

"Wait until Sakanoff sees this. He'll eat his heart out in envy. Drive down his street, Horace."

So I drove slowly down Elmhurst Avenue. Sakanoff, who was the one enemy my father had — because Sakanoff, too, was an inventor! — came charging out of his house. I thought he would attempt to hide his envy, but he didn't.

"Stop the car," father instructed me as Sakanoff lumbered toward us. Sakanoff's dark, heavy face was one mass of frowns.

"Oscar Wilbury!" he roared. "You didn't buy that car with your own money, and don't tell me you did!"

Father had a very mild expression on his face. Ever since Sakanoff had got the jump on him by inventing a vibration machine that could move heavy boxes around, father had been a little unhappy. Now he was having his revenge.

"No," he admitted in answer to Sakanoff's charge, "I didn't buy it." Then

* Perhaps this machine of Father's performed the miracle of transformation by a sort of atomic "suggestion" fostered by the likeness of the picture. Since the original object was a motor car, the new car would have all the requisite parts to make it capable of operation, and each part would be the modernization of the original part, following the "suggestion" of the picture in its formation. Since the old auto body was a Buick body, the new suggestion of a Cadillac body would be followed out to its ultimate form by the rearranging of the atoms in the picture pattern. Similarly with the carburetor, naturally not visible in the photograph, but a part of the "suggestion" nevertheless. Thus, the new car is as capable of real performance as the old one.—Ed.

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he exclaimed triumphantly: "I made it with this!" He patted the box with the tubes and wires and gadgets.

"I don't believe it," Sakanoff challenged. "Prove it!"

At this point I butted in. I said:

"Listen, you Cossack, if we produce another car like this one by tomorrow, will you take it off our hands for five hundred dollars?"

He gagged, then roared: "Yes!"

"All right," I said. "Just have the money ready!"

I shifted to first and we drove away. Father was chuckling and enjoying the situation, but I knew there was work to be done. I let him off at the house and drove to the nearest car wrecking lot. I went up to a grimy individual and offered him a ten-spot for a rusty old wreck.

"Twenty," this person stated, "and she's yours."

I acquiesced, and handed over the bills.

Half an hour later, father turned his ray on the dilapidated wreck. Four minutes later another 1940 Cadillac stood in its place!

THE very next morning father and I drove our second Cadillac over to Sakanoff's home. Sakanoff's face darkened, and he grew bewildered as I cheerfully offered him the car and asked for the five hundred smackers. But at five hundred bucks the car was a terrific bargain, and he knew it. But the triumphant expression on father's round, innocent face evidently griped him. Father for once was not behind the eight-ball.

As we left with the five hundred I said:

"D'ya know, Father, we could go into business selling these cars and make a cool fortune."

Father agreed. So we went over to the auto wrecking lot and had them tow five jallopies to our garage. Then swiftly we turned them into Cadillacs. I drove one to the front of the house. As I was pasting a sign on the windshield, announcing that the car could be had for five hundred dollars, a seedy-looking person wheezing on a cigarette strolled up to me.

"She's a bargain, Mister," I said. "We're practically giving it away."

The man let his little gray eyes roam over the lines of the Cadillac. Whether the sleek bus met his approval was impossible to tell from his inscrutable face. Finally, he muttered from the corner of his mouth:

"She's pretty fast, eh?"

I warmed up. "Mister," I said, "she's so fast that she meets herself coming and going. She's so fast that the running boards had to be removed, because otherwise she would fly."

The stranger looked at her for a moment longer, then reached into his pocket and brought out a wad of bills. He peeled off five and handed them to me. Hundred dollar bills! I hid my amazement until he had driven away, then I dashed into the house to show my father and mother the money.

"Take it to the bank," mother advised. "Before your father gets any more ideas."

I did just that. Everything was taking on a rosy hue. But there was one thing father and I hadn't figured on. . .

During the rest of the day, father and I had fun changing our outmoded radio set into a television receiver, our noisy refrigerator into a streamlined new one, our old furniture into brand new French period furniture. Mother took to bed early with a headache.

Next morning someone banged loudly on our front door. As I sleepily approached to answer, I heard Sakanoff's booming voice raised in anger. I opened

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the door just as father came to my side. Sakanoff was bellowing to Sheriff Charlie Abbott and his dull-faced deputy. Then he caught sight of my father.

"Oscar Wilbury!" he roared. "You have swindled me out of five hundred dollars! I shall have you put in jail for this!"

"What . . . what?" father muttered, dazed.

Sakanoff bellowed: "That Cadillac you sold me has turned into a wreck! Before my eyes, it turned into a 1929 Nash!"

I gasped. Then I ran out to the garage. Two of the cars were still Cadillacs, but the other two had changed back into their former dilapidated state! As I reentered the house, father was pulling on his pants. He looked pathetically at me.

"Two of them," I informed him, "are wrecks."

FATHER passed a weary hand over his brow. He muttered:

"I guess the best the atomizator can do is to transform matter into a temporary state of change. As soon as the lines of energy lose their force, the matter tends to disintegrate into its previous form."

"Uh-huh," I said vaguely. I was horribly disappointed.

Sheriff Abbott intervened. "Give Sakanoff his five hundred dollars back and everything will be all right." He impaled father with a jaundiced eye. "And that invention of yours: I think it's illegal. Better bring it down to the station until I can find out whether it is or not!"

The sheriff and his deputy, Sakanoff, father and I crowded into the sheriff's old car.

"I've got the money in the bank," I told the law officer.

Sakanoff was leering at father's invention and making sarcastic remarks, and father felt pretty bad about it all. So did I.

Sakanoff snarled: "That brainchild of yours couldn't raise a blister!"

Father couldn't say anything. Neither could I. Sheriff Abbott drove grouchily toward the bank. Then suddenly a shot blasted the quiet of the morning! Then another.

"The bank!" the sheriff exclaimed.

His foot jammed down on the gas and the old jallopy jumped forward. We rattled around a corner and came charging out on the main street and in sight of the bank. Three gangsters were just leaving the bank, money bags in one hand and guns in the other. A fourth killer was at the wheel of the car. The sheriff's deputy drew a gun and shouted:

"Stop!"

A storm of bullets from the trio made him duck. Then the three were in the car and it was screaming away. Suddenly I gasped. For the car the bandits were in was a Cadillac—and one of the bandits was the man I had sold that car to yesterday!

I bleated the news to father, as Sheriff Abbott thrust out his jaw grimly and sent the old bus in pursuit of the bank robbers. Sakanoff reared up and waved his arms excitedly.

The sheriff yelled: "That must be the same gang that held up the Herrington bank!"

"Why, there's a five thousand dollar reward for them!" I exclaimed.

Meanwhile, the Cadillac was drawing swiftly away. In two minutes the bandits were on the state road and increasing their lead. The sheriff's jallopy couldn't do more than forty miles, while the bandit car could do eighty without any trouble.

"We'll never catch them!" Sakanoff groaned.

In a short while the Cadillac was al-

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most out of sight. Suddenly, father snapped his fingers.

"Stop this car!" he yelled.

"You nuts?" Sheriff Abbott snapped, without turning his head.

Father pointed at his screwy black box.

"I know how to make this car go faster!" he shouted. "You haven't anything to lose — you can't catch them anyway!"

The sheriff jammed on the brakes and we swerved to a stop. Father reached into his pocket and brought out some pictures. Meanwhile, we all got hastily out of the rattletrap. I, of course, had an idea of what he was going to do, but the others didn't. Yet none of us was taking any chances.

Father put a picture into the ray machine, pointed it at the old bus—and presto! The ancient jallopy began to twist and give off heat, and in a few minutes it had turned into a magnificent new Rolls-Royce! We piled into the Rolls-Royce and I took the wheel. Pretty soon I had her doing eighty-five. She was a lot faster than even the Cadillac.

The bandits came into sight in no time, and Sheriff Abbott and the deputy unlimbered their guns for action. When the Cadillac was about twenty-five yards away, the sheriff began shooting.

IMMEDIATELY the gangsters returned the fire. One bullet ploughed through the windshield.

"Let me out!" Sakanoff suddenly screeched. Then a front tire whistled and went flat. The steering wheel began to jump around under my hands, and I had to stop the car.

"Well, we lose!" I murmured. "We'll never catch them now."

The others slumped down disgustedly and glared at the disappearing Cadillac. In a minute the bandits would be out of sight. All at once father woke up.

"Look!" he shouted. We looked. *The Cadillac was changing shape! It was turning back into the junk heap I'd got from the wrecking lot!*

At the same time the bandits realized something was wrong, but too late As it collapsed into its former state, the once beautiful automobile began to fly apart. The old jallopy simply couldn't take such extreme speeds. It swerved madly from one side of the road to the other, threatening to turn turtle. Finally, a wheel came off. The wreck turned over and over, and at last it slammed into a ditch, looking as though a demolition bomb had struck it.

Despite the punctured tire, I drove our Rolls-Royce to the bandit car.

Sheriff Abbott and his deputy jumped out with ready guns, but the four gangsters were sprawled out cold.

FATHER and I got two-fifths of the reward for capturing the killers. Sakanoff took his thousand without protest.

Father has never patented his invention. But he threatens more or less vaguely that he will.

"As soon as my atomizator can transform objects into — er — permanent shapes," is his way of putting it.

Meanwhile, mother and I walk around with our fingers crossed.

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The cat-man plunged the needle into my neck

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War of Human Cats

By FESTUS PRAGNELL

America was helpless before this amazing invasion of cats in human form. Who were they, and what was the Master's purpose?

"HAVE you anything to say before I have you shot?" the Master asked me.

He did not shout, emotionless fiend that he was. His voice was a horrible, squeaky falsetto. He seemed bored, as though having me murdered was nothing more than the removing of an insect.

My guards, who had bound my arms with such a ridiculously unnecessary number of biting strands of thin cord, stood around in listless, slouching attitudes, some of them with cigarets dangling from their lips. Many hundreds they must have seen being treated as I was being treated since unexpected civil war had leaped upon the U. S. A. like a tiger. How well, how secretly, they had laid their plans!

"No," I said in reply.

It was useless to argue. I was doomed to die for the crime of defending my country. "Resisting the liberators of America" was what the rebels called it. Useless to deny the charge. My voice sounded normal as though I did not care.

And, in fact, I was beyond caring. I had been through so much since the amazing night attack in which men around me had been shot while they slept and I knocked on the head as I tried to jump to my feet. And we had thought ourselves to be fifty miles behind the front line!

After the dark cell, the miserable food, and the biting cords, what cared I if they killed me? Let them get the deed done! I loathed them for their indifference, their boredom, their dirt and their slovenliness.

The Master, a slim, dry, gray-haired man with a quirk of amusement to his mouth, jerked his thumb in a significant downward gesture. It was too much trouble for him to speak. A jerk of the thumb would do.

A guard pulled one of the cords that bound me as a farm hand might jerk on the tethering rope of a cow. He swung me around, nearly throwing me to the floor. As this happened, my face was close to his and I looked into his eyes.

It was the first time I had had a close-up view of one of my captors. Previously I had always been in the dark. Even now I had been in daylight such a little while that I was still somewhat dazzled.

Something peculiar, something unhuman about these men had been puzzling me. Something of which their silence, their dull, stupid faces, their laziness and their stealthy, springy walk were all a part.

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That man's eyes were not human eyes. They were more like the eyes of a cat. There were no irises, the pupils were vertical slits and the whites were a yellowish green. With superstitious fear I turned my head to see the eyes of the other rebels.

Their eyes were the same. Vertical black slits of pupils stared out of each pair of sockets. Desperately I swung my head.

Every man in that dingy room, that room with its inverted mockery of justice, had those same feline eyes with the vertical slits.

That, I think, was the first time that I was really frightened. The superstitions of my progenitors rose in me. They swept over me, terrifying. Death I had faced without a tremor, but this was something utterly outside normal human experience. Was I in the grip of devils, of ghosts, of werewolves or of vampires? Or of what?

In my spasm of sheer terror I think I must have made strange noises. I saw the next prisoner, trussed as I was, turn to me, alarmed. But those human cats (I can think of no other way of describing them) took no notice.

"Who are you?" I screamed. "You are not men. Tell me! Who are you?"

The human cats did not even turn their heads. It was, I suppose, only the thousandth repetition of the same boring scene to them, the dawning realizations of a man being taken away to die.

Another hand jerked impatiently on my ropes. I almost expected to see claws on it. Then, with oddly silent steps and without a word, they hustled me down a corridor.

I WAS taken into a large hall that, in peaceful times, had been used for dancing. Chairs and small tables were stacked at the end of the room. In the middle of the polished floor was an enameled table with many large bottles, knives, hypodermic needles and other instruments of surgery.

On one side of this hall sat or lay many men and some women and even children. Some of the men were in khaki, as I was, and others in civilian clothes. All had their arms bound as mine were bound, and all watched the man at the table in fascinated horror.

On the other side of the hall, beyond the table, lay many more figures, but these were rigid and motionless, their arms no longer bound.

I saw men and women lifted onto the enameled table one by one. The man in white bent over them, seemed to be injecting something into their necks. Violent contortions and gurgling cries followed, then the victim was still and was wheeled away to take his or her place among the rows and rows of still forms.

"What is this?" I asked.

"We do not use bullets," a human cat told me, tonelessly. "Your shot will be a shot of poison. The master's rage is terrible."

I was dumped with the others.

The human cats kept on with their horrible work of slaughter in silence. Their faces were blank, except for the executioner himself, who smiled happily.

Around me the future victims of the needle were mostly still and silent. I noticed that anybody who made a noise, weeping, sobbing or begging for mercy, was certain to be next for the table.

Victims were carried to the table on silent, automatic trucks. On the same truck each body was carried away. As one victim lay on the table the next would be waiting beside it, ready to be lifted up in his or her turn.

And I, like those around me, sat still,

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watching, trying not to breathe lest the noise attract the automatic truck in my direction. Desperately, I clung to life for the last few possible minutes.

I saw my comrades, captured like myself in the night attack, go to the table. I saw men's nerves give way, and heard them scream abuse at the human cats. The rebels took no notice except to see that the needle ended the noise at the next opportunity.

In a desperate, sweating fear I lay, my heart leaping or stopping at every move of the trucks. After many minutes there was a pause as the white-clad, smiling executioner opened a new bottle. Soon after that a change came over me. This suspense was worse than death itself. I wanted to end it, quickly.

I began to shout, violent foolish abuse, using every objectionable term I could think of. I told the human cats to end my existence as soon as possible so that I would not see their loathesome forms about me any more.

I saw the man, or the two-legged cat, in white look in my direction.

"Stop that noise!" I heard him say.

As I was lifted onto the truck and strapped down I stopped shouting.. I was wheeled to the table, placed on it.

THE human cat looked at me with a peculiar smile.

"Impatient?" he asked. Apart from his eyes he looked human.

"I was," I said, feeling that perhaps I had been hasty.

He nodded, with another grin.

"What is your name?"

"James Montgomery."

"The life of James Montgomery is over," he said, producing a filled needle that an assistant had handed him below my line of vision. "To James Montgomery comes the sweet oblivion of death, wiping out all things for ever and ever." His voice now had a sing-song, droning quality.

"The Master's rage is terrible," he added, as though whispering a secret.

I felt the point of the needle.

"So nice of you to keep still," he said. "It makes it easier to inject the poison in exactly the right place. Much more economical, with the chemicals, too."

I was being murdered with the finest feline courtesy and grace. Presently I would, no doubt, be just so much butcher's meat to them. Why was I submitting so tamely? I tensed my muscles for a last struggle. I tried to raise my bound ankles to kick out with both legs together.

But the shot had gone home. Like fire it plunged into my flesh, searing, burning. The dose of venom seemed like a red-hot sword the size of a man's arm.

In my pain I looked again at the man in the white overalls. He was grinning pleasantly. A sparkle of sheer enjoyment was in his catlike eyes under his few strands of white hair. My agony amused him.

I writhed. My brain seemed to twist in knots.

All this was the direct effect of the poison on my nerves. But soon the poisoned blood reached the brain. It was like a great black wall. A rushing flood of nearing unconsciousness, swamping, engulfing. It was as though I had plunged suddenly below the surface of a mighty river of darkness, and of silence.

Lights abruptly became dim. Sounds faded. My pain did not so much end as seem to go a long way away.

I felt hands seize me, lift me down. I wanted to speak, to say, "I am not dead yet," but my head and lips seemed to weigh tons. I could not move them. And, anyway, what did it matter?

I listened to a pounding, rushing

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river. It was my own blood coursing through my veins. As long as that river poured on I was still alive. When it stopped I would be dead.

That is the last thing that I remember—listening to the circulation of my own blood within my ears, and marveling that it was still so strong.

I DID not die. The river poured on, never faltering. For months, it seemed to me, I listened to it.

But James Montgomery was gone. I forgot who he was and all about him. I seemed to be an unborn child, life yet unopened before me. The rushing stream seemed to be the maternal blood stream.

At last I opened my eyes. It seemed a tremendous experiment, the opening of my eyes. It was as something I had never tried before, and the consequences might be terrible. My eyes met —light. I wondered what it was. I had never seen light before.

Shapes moved about. One came and put food in my mouth. It was good, but it was a long time before I understood what I was intended to do with it.

Then I was shoved into a sitting position. A shape lay in the rough bed next to mine. I realized that he was another creature like myself.

After a long while I said to him, "Goo-goo!" And thought how awfully clever I was.

He thought hard and long, then replied with, "Gug-gug!"

We both laughed and thought how clever we were. For a long while we eyed each other, sucking our thumbs.

A man in uniform passed along the beds.

"I don't understand," he said to the man who seemed to have charge of me, "C. T. 72603, then C. T. 72613, then C. T. 72676. Why the big gaps? The Master's rage is terrible."

"There was a mistake," the male nurse said. "One bottle of serum was much overstrength. Of one whole batch only 72613 survived." He pointed at me.

"Bad," said the officer, shaking his head. "We reckon on a survival rate of at least three out of four. Somebody will lose his head over this when the Master hears."

"The Master's rage is terrible," said the male nurse, droningly, as though repeating a set lesson.

And though the words they spoke were meaningless to me I somehow knew that they were about me, and I remembered them so well that later, as I learned to speak, I could still repeat them. But still I did not understand. For, in that queer second childhood of mine, all recollection of James Montgomery, colonel in the army of America, and of his supposed execution had gone.

It seemed quite natural that everybody around me should have the eyes of cats, with narrow slits of pupils in daylight that expanded in darkness so that they could see their way about with ease when there was not enough light for normal eyes to detect at all. With my human eyes I felt inferior, but my eyes were changing. They were becoming the same as the eyes of the others around me.

There was no artificial light that I noticed in the barracks. Where electric light was fitted the globes had been taken away. Everybody could see quite well in the dark.

"GET up! Get up! The Master calls! There is great work for you to do. We must all serve the Master. The Master's rage is terrible. He punishes those who do not obey him. He destroys those who do not work for him. In the Master's service there is much

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to be done, and much danger. Arise, follow the Captain, and learn your tasks."

I think it must have been a loud-speaker that uttered the words. I felt strangely stirred, and like all those around me I followed the Captain without question.

Then, in a big house, we all learned to handle rifles, machine-guns, autos, tanks, airplanes or big guns. We learned with amazing speed, for our muscles were already accustomed to the tasks, although our brains had forgotten them. All the while the loud-speakers were blaring with great insistence into our ears.

"Yours is a great, a high destiny. You are to fight for the Master. It is a glorious task. The Master's enemies are strong and numerous, but you will find that you have one great advantage over them. You can see in the dark. They cannot.

"Therefore you can attack them at night, by starlight and moonlight, when there is insufficient light for them to see, but enough for you. Then you can walk up close to them, unheard and unseen, and shoot them down with your silent guns. You will find that you can aim at them point blank while you are still invisible to them. You can bring down their airplanes if they fly by night, or bomb their airdromes and destroy their lines of communication at night without the least fear of retaliation.

"This marvelous power the Master has given you to aid you in doing his work. But remember! Do not kill for the sake of killing. Whenever you can, take prisoners. For every prisoner you take will become a soldier of the Master. Remember that. One prisoner taken alive is as good as four of the enemy killed. The Master's rage is terrible."

And so forth, endlessly. We believed it all without question.

In time I found that I was somehow different from the others. They could see in the dark, but I could see better. They walked with a catlike stealthiness, but I was more silent than they. For this I was much praised, and made a Captain. My nails changed somewhat, becoming thicker and pointed as though they were turning into claws. A strange urge came upon me to creep abroad at night and pounce upon small animals.

Two things were forbidden under the strictest penalties in the settlement. One was "Prowling alone by night," and the other was "Climbing." But my urge was strong. I prowled, and I seized and killed a small dog. It was a great thrill to me.

Next day there was a terrific uproar. The manner in which I had mangled the dog's body with my developing claws seemed to prove that one of the Master's men had done it. It was regarded as a terrible crime. But with feline cunning I had hidden my tracks, climbing across the roof back to my room, and I faced all questions with a perfectly blank face. I was not found out and I breathed easier.

After that I controlled my strange urges. They roused the Master's wrath, and that meant death. But I still wanted to creep abroad at night, to prowl over roofs, to seize upon and to devour small living things. It was an urge I had to thrust down.

THE date of my capture was the 13th of May, 1948. On the 29th of May I was a fully-rated Captain in the army of the human cats, under the Master. The time seemed much longer to me. Colonel James Montgomery of the American Army existed no longer. In his place was C. T. 72613, rebel and

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Captain in the army of the revolting Master.*

"You are to be a spy," I was told one day. "Our great need now is for transport; autos and trucks to carry men and supplies from point to point of our enormous and rapidly advancing front.

"Take these dark glasses. You will be landed by airplane behind the enemy lines. Your job is to capture an auto, or, if you can, a truck, and drive it back here. If you can capture one or more prisoners as well so much the better. The Master's rage is terrible."

"The Master's rage is terrible," I replied, saluting.

The airplane landed me on a dark field. There was less than a half moon, but I could see well. The place was oddly familiar, like meeting in real life somebody one has dreamed about.

"The Master's rage is terrible," said the pilot, as he took leave of me.

I was alone and strangely happy. The night was pleasantly cool, and for me it was not dark. It smelled damp, and the leaf-mould scent of woods spoke of rabbits and pheasants to be caught. I was a creature of the night. Let me forget the Master for a while and enjoy myself. I flexed my developing talons.

Swiftly, silently, I glided into the woods. But though I saw several rabbits and pheasants I caught none. My legs were still human legs. I had nothing yet to be compared with the agility of a real cat. Wild creatures avoided my clumsy springs, my reaching hands, with ease.

I was bitterly disappointed with myself. I had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. I could not catch rabbits with my hands.

A dog barked at the slight noise I made. I scrambled over a wall and found myself in an orchard. The dog sprang at me, but I picked up a heavy stick and swung it, crushing the dog's skull.

Then I was happier. I had killed. I was a beast of prey.

I dropped on my knees and tried to eat that dog. I got a mouthful of hair. Horrible. I cut off a lump of him with my knife. Not much better.

Instead, I ate apples from the trees. My instincts were to devour my kill, but the apples tasted better.

And as I ate I was thinking:

"Somewhen, sometime, I have been here before. I have climbed these same trees and eaten the apples. How else did I know with such certainty which tree held the sweetest fruit?"

Beyond the trees, to the right, was a

* By June 1st of 1948, Bates' *History of The Feline War* tells us the uprising of the human cats, beginning in Arizona, had swept clear to the Pacific seaboard and was rolling across the great plains toward Chicago. Three-fourths of the U. S. A. was under the mysterious Master whose name was unknown and who allied all the usual cunning of dictatorship with a new and ghastly science.

His armies swelled in amazing manner while those of the government melted. His devotees forgot their past, becoming his blind, fanatical servants. Everywhere in the still unconquered territory were cells of spies who wore dark glasses by day to hide their eyes and went out by night to organize sabotage and dope important persons.

Many an army officer disappeared for two weeks, then returned with a plausible tale, a spy of the Master. In these cases a different serum must have been used, for the eyes did not change.

Always the rebels did their fighting by night. For then it was a case of men who could see, fighting those who could not. Division after division of men was surprised in camp, and most of the prisoners forced to become slaves of the Master, fighting their former comrades.

It was suicide for a government plane to fly by night. Out of the darkness would come a hail of bullets from a plane that could be heard but not seen. Blackouts were useless against men with the eyes of cats. Vital centers were bombed, railroads, munition works, ammunition dumps, soldiers in training. As soon as night fell the human cats ruled the sky, bombing where they chose. Nothing did the human cats fear but searchlights, and the whole of the U. S. A. did not contain two per cent of the searchlights needed. Bombing airplanes put out those there were, and then the army of the human cats swept forward, their eyes faintly visible in the darkness, glowing green.—Ed.

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house. I knew exactly what that house looked like, with its lawns, its tennis courts, its swimming pool. In my dreams I had known it. I would go and see whether my dreams had been right.

I passed through cedar, rhododendron, pampas grass, as I had known I would. I heard the harsh scream of a peacock, but it no longer stimulated my hunting instincts. The house was just as I had known it would be.

That made things easy. On the right of the house was a garage containing a large and powerful auto. I would steal that. The Major would be pleased when I got back so soon and so successfully.

The garage doors were locked, but I forced them open, using a plank as a crowbar. It made rather a noise. I waited and listened, but all seemed still.

I went in. The car was there.

I heard someone approaching. A man in pajamas and slippers was coming along the path. No doubt the noise had roused him, and he was coming to see if anything was wrong. If he had carried a torch I would have shot him, for I feared light, which destroyed my advantage over normal men. But his hands were empty.

THE man came into the garage.

"You are my prisoner," I said, covering him.

I saw the blood drain from his face and his mouth drop open.

"Jim!" he muttered, faintly. "That was Jim's voice!"

Again that sense of queer familiarity came over me. I fought it down.

"I am a soldier of the Master," I said. "I need your car. And I need you."

"I can't see you," he said.

"I can see you," I answered. "That is sufficient. Get into the car and keep still while I start it up. If you make any trouble I shall shoot."

"You can't start this car," he said.

"Why not?"

"It is out of order. New laws. All cars when not in use have to be locked so that only the authorized driver can start them. So many cars have been stolen by the rebels."

I thought quickly.

"Then start the car up yourself. I shall be covering you."

He moved to the electric light switch.

"Let that switch alone," I ordered.

"How can I start up the car if I can't see?"

I had not thought of that.

He began to talk, rapidly, eagerly.

"There are thick curtains to cover the windows. Not a chink of light would show out. Air raid precautions."

"Very well then."

He covered the windows and turned on the light, looking full at me.

"Jim!" he cried. "It *is* you. We thought you were dead. I thought that you were a ghost, and that you would vanish when I put the light on."

"I know nothing of your Jim," I said. "I am a soldier of the Master. Get this car started."

"Don't you know me?" he asked, in a sort of puzzled despair. "I'm Peter, your brother." Then he must have caught sight of my eyes, for he gasped. "Jim—those eyes. . . ."

A deep misery and horror were in his eyes and voice. Somehow, it made my flesh creep.

Something was here that I did not understand.

"Will you get the car started?" I asked, sternly.

Slowly he moved to the front of the car. The engine began to throb.

"Is that noise necessary?" I asked.

"I can't help it, Jim."

"Don't call me Jim."

The car made little noise, really, but

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there was a chance that somebody might be roused. I posted myself at a window where I could watch for anybody leaving the house. My hand was near the switch. One touch, and I would be back in my friendly, covering darkness, seeing but unseen. Then, all normal men would be at the mercy of my silent revolver.

The garage filled with fumes.

Peter, as he called himself, had opened the bonnet of the car and was bending over the engine. The double door was slightly ajar behind him, letting a thin sliver of light across the lawn. My head was strangely dizzy.

"How much longer will you be?" I asked. My voice sounded thick.

"Not long," he said, anxiously. "The car has been out of use for some time. Gasoline shortage. Things have got corroded."

Things began to swim around me. I saw Peter's face, quite close, anxious and peering at me. I tried to raise my revolver, but his hand closed over it, taking it away.

Then I fell, but he caught me.

Vaguely I remember him putting his arms around me and dragging me out of the garage. After that all was blank.

WHEN I awoke I was seated in the back of the auto, which was bowling along the road. Peter and another man were in front. My wrists were bound, but not uncomfortably. My head ached fit to split. The realization that I had failed swept over me. I shivered in terror at the thought of the rage of the Master when he heard of my failure.

"What are you doing with me?" I blustered.

Peter looked around.

"Sorry, Jim. I had to do it. I deliberately let the engine run in a closed garage, filling the air with carbon-monoxide fumes.* I kept near the doors and avoided the worst. You must feel pretty bad, Jim."

"Don't call me Jim," I said weakly.

"But you *are* Jim," he insisted. "A dozen little marks, scars and moles prove it. Do you think I don't know the little brother who shared my cot with me, played soldiers with me?"

"You are James Montgomery all right," the other man said. "The chances are millions to one against such a perfect resemblance, and one look at your teeth puts the matter beyond all doubt. The marks of decay here and there, the fillings, all are identical with the teeth of James Montgomery."

"Are not my teeth longer, more pointed?" I asked.

"How did you know that?"

I saw that I had made a mistake.

"Something strange has happened to you," the man said. "We mean to find out what it is."

I felt unpleasantly helpless. What these men talked of I could not understand. All I had been taught was what was necessary to make me a soldier of the Master. Beyond that I was as a new-born babe. My brain was in darkness save for one spot. And I was horribly afraid; afraid of the unknown, but still more afraid of the Master. Where these men were taking me I did not know, but wherever it was I was certain that the Master would find me.

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*Carbon monoxide gas is poisonous. It combines with the hæmoglobin of the blood just as oxygen does, forming a stable compound and thus preventing the oxygen in the lungs from reaching the tissues. Unconsciousness follows.

A molecule of carbon monoxide consists of one atom of carbon and one of oxygen. It has two free valency bonds, and is thus so similar to oxygen that the hæmoglobin of the blood is deceived, discovering the mistake only when it tries to give up the supposed oxygen but cannot. One more atom of oxygen turns carbon monoxide into carbon dioxide, which is inert and harmless. Many people have been killed by carbon monoxide fumes given off by auto engines.—Ed.

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When the car stopped and I was taken out I struggled, although my arms were bound. My legs, I found, were remarkably strong.

Peter became annoyed.

"Now, Jim, are you going to persist in being foolish? If you do you will be put into a strait-jacket. You can't get away from here. They know all about your strength and your power of seeing in the dark. All they want and all I want is to secure your own welfare. Can't you see that? I am not your enemy, I am your oldest friend in the world, your own flesh and blood."

I spat at him, but I quieted down. I did not know what a strait-jacket was, and the word frightened me.

IN that house, which was, of course, what is termed a mental hospital in polite circles, I was given a room. Peter's and my own money and influence kept me out of the ordinary prison camps.

My room was comfortable. In fact, it was padded all over. But the door was of metal with heavy bolts. And the window was three stories up, looking out over a countryside with woods and fields.

Through that window I would gaze at night and my old longing would well up in me to prowl under the moon, stalking and chasing rabbits and birds. With a little more practice, I was certain, I could catch the rabbits. My legs were getting stronger and more springy every day.

Many men came to see me. There were men in the uniforms of army Generals, men whom I know now to have been prominent politicians in the government that had its back to the wall. Other men stuck needles into me and examined me.

They discussed things in front of me as though I was not there. The men who stuck needles into me were particularly interested in the patch of soft hair spreading over my chest, the larger patch on my back, and in my fingers and toe nails.

"The case of your brother, Mr. Montgomery," they said, "while incomprehensible, is by no means unusual. Unfortunately, there are thousands of such cases. Nearly every rebel prisoner we take we find to have been formerly a government soldier. They are not traitors, but they have lost their memories and do not know what they are doing. And their eyes have changed, which gives them the uncanny power of seeing in the dark. The hair on your brother's chest, Mr. Montgomery, is a close imitation of the fur of a cat. And his nails are slowly turning into a cat's claws."

Peter groaned.

"Do you tell me that my brother is turning into a cat?"

"Yes, that is exactly what is happening."

"How far will the process go?" Peter asked, hoarsely.

"Who can tell? It may stop, or it may go on, until—until it is complete."

"Complete!" gasped Peter, realizing what this word meant. "Then my brother would be a huge cat, a tiger!"

"Calm yourself. The chances are that it will prove impossible for that to happen."

"But what makes him *like* it?"

"Ah, Mr. Montgomery! What wouldn't we give to know! Then we would have a chance of getting even with this monster who calls himself the Master and who is making this weird change in so many brave men. We could turn all our prisoners into loyal soldiers once more, and they would have the power of seeing in the dark still, which would make them the equals of the Master's dupes. If only we

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could cure it.

"All we can say as yet is that there are strange substances in your brother's blood. Complicated substances that defy our powers of analysis. As a guess I should say that a large quantity of hormones from the thyroid glands of a cat have been injected into your brother's veins.

"But cheer up. While there's life there's hope, you know. The human system may yet prove capable of throwing off these foreign substances."

He grinned an elfin grin. He meant it to be reassuring, but to Peter it seemed to be a mockery of his fears.

"Do you mean that unless that happens we can do nothing about it?"

"We mean to try everything we can think of," the other said, not sounding very hopeful.

Peter groaned again.

WEEKS passed. My system showed no sign of throwing off the alien substances. Instead the patches of hair on my chest and back grew larger and my claws developed. I found it intolerable to wear clothes, and spent all my time naked. And more and more I wanted to run loose, to stalk and pursue wild creatures.

As my legs grew stronger and my agility increased I would stare out of my window and reflect that my way to freedom would soon be open before me. Unclimbable as that wall was to any normal human, to a human cat it was not. I could dig my claws into the mortar between bricks, into crevices, and hold on while I leaped from window to window. I was sure I could get out of the window, leap from sill to sill, and so reach the wing, leap a gap between two roofs, reach a tree and so to the ground.

At last the night came when I tried it. Trembling, yet thrilled by adventure, I crouched on the window ledge. I wondered whether I could make it. To a man it was an unthinkable leap that I was trying, yet my cat's instinct seemed to whisper to me that I could do it, that there was no need to stay locked up in this man-made prison any longer.

I sprang. I reached the other window. I held. My instinct was justified. I reached the guttering of the wing, jumped the gap between two roofs, landed in the tree.

I was away.

In the woods I came upon rabbits, stalked and chased them. Presently to my great delight I caught one. With teeth and claws I tore the body, and ate some of it. The warm blood tasted glorious.

Then I began climbing, after birds. My claws helped me greatly. But here I overestimated my skill. A branch that looked strong cracked as I landed on it. I crashed to the ground, hurting my ankle.

A fall seldom hurts a cat, which is light, can turn in midair to land on its feet and use its tail as a brake. But I had the weight of a man, and my tail, which I tried to use, was as yet barely six inches long. I was wretchedly disappointed over this trivial matter.

In a small woodland glade, several miles from the asylum, where there was no smell of human feet, I went to sleep. The sun rose in a cloudless sky, and its heat was delightful on my naked body. But here again I blundered.

When I woke in the afternoon my skin was stinging and burning all over. My instincts had assumed that my body was completely covered with fur, whereas only a part of my back and chest were protected from the sunlight as yet. The full power of a summer sun had blazed away all day long on the rest of me. I was severely sunburned.

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During the next few days I was tortured by a badly peeling skin. I could not sit or lie down without putting my weight on some part of me that it was agony to touch. And my wrenched ankle would not let me stand up for long.

Then rain began to pelt down. There was no shelter that I could find. Under the trees the wind blew the drops off the leaves with stinging fury. I was wretchedly cold and wet. And I was very, very hungry, for, with my wrenched ankle I could not get near the rabbits or the birds.

The life of a wild cat was not all it had seemed to be.

AND now, incomprehensibly, memory was coming back to me. Pictures would come to me, scenes of my childhood days. They fitted in not at all with this life of a feline creature of the woods. I would see the children I had played with when I was small, my father and mother, Peter as a boy. I would squirm in misery and bewilderment, wondering what these strange scenes were that rose unbidden in my mind.

The past and the present were as two voices calling me, and steadily the past grew stronger. As a man awakening from a dream, I knew who I was.

But what had been happening, and what was I, Colonel James Montgomery, doing in these woods, naked, with my body a cross between a human body and that of a giant cat? Was I an outcast from human society for evermore? Was it possible for me to return and mix with my kind again?

And I had been fighting for the rebels, against my own comrades. I had been made into a traitor and deprived even of my human form. I shook my fist in the air, my fist that was developing into a padded paw, and shouted,

"I will be revenged!"

Then I made my way back to the asylum. Several people whom I met on the way screamed and ran. I suppose I was not a pleasant spectacle.

At the gates of the asylum the men in charge goggled at me with open mouths.

"I am Colonel James Montgomery," I said. "I recently had quarters in this, ah! hotel of yours, and left in a hurry. I would like to see the officer in charge."

I was stark naked, smothered with dirt and scratches from brambles, large areas of my body were covered with fur, tabby fur, and I had a six-inch furry tail.

It took them some little time to realize that I was the escaped patient, and then I was soon shown in. The asylum doctor came to me at once.

"So you have come back," he said, wondering. "They tell me that you remember who you are."

"I am Colonel James Montgomery of the army of the United States," I said. "Send for Peter as quickly as possible!"

"We will fetch your brother without delay," he promised, "but first you must have a bath and a meal."

When he came, Peter put his arms around me and wept on my tabby chest.

"I AM certain," said the eminent surgeon, "that what brought your memory back was the sunburn."

"I do not understand," I said. "I am a simple soldier. How can sunburn restore a man's memory?"

"Well," he explained, "sunlight on the human skin produces Vitamin D. Vitamin D controls the calcium and phosphorus of the blood and enables us to produce bones and teeth. It also helps the system to eliminate many germs and poisons.

"You will remember that I said your

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system might itself throw off these poisons that have been introduced into it. Apparently it was able to do so, but only after it had been strengthened for the task by large supplies of Vitamin D.

"Regard the poisons as an invading army. Your army of defense was able to defeat and drive out the invader, but only after it had received the necessary arms and munitions."

"This is a queer war," I said. "Shall I change back into a normal man again?"

"I am afraid not, but the change will go no further."

"Hrmmmmp!" said I. "Well, there are compensations. How will this affect my commission?"

"Sorry to tell you, but you have already been retired, on pension."

"So they want no freak Colonels, eh?"

"They say," said Peter, uncomfortably, "that they could not expect men to regard you now as an officer in the same way as they would a normal man."

"Good!" I said.

"But, Jim! I thought you would be upset at the news."

"I'm not," I said. "I'm not a man now. I'm half a cat. And the cat walks alone. Remember the old saying?

"Cats don't fight in packs or herds. I'll fight this swine who calls himself the Master in my own way and in my own time. I shall strike in stealth and secrecy.

"Now, first, let us lay plans. Show me the lay of the land. How can I strike? How can the dupes of this Master be brought back to remember who they are, and to boil as I boil, with murderous fury against the man who has done this to them? Must I strip all the Master's soldiers naked and tie them up to lie in the sunshine?"

"Oh, no," the surgeon said. "It is not as difficult as that. There are other ways of getting Vitamin D into human systems in large quantities. It can be eaten, or it can be injected."

"All prisoners must be injected, then. When they remember who they are and what has happened to them they will boil with intense hatred of the man who as done it. Nothing else will seem to them to matter."

"That will no doubt be done."

"Right. Now give me the auto I was sent here to fetch. I will return with it. I will tell them that I was captured by government forces but escaped. That will explain why I have been so long away. Give me a hypodermic needle and a supply of Vitamin D. I will do all the harm I can to this devilish Master."

Peter turned to the surgeon.

"What do you think?"

"The position of the government is desperate. I would do nothing to stop a man from helping his country now. I will get you a needle and a supply of pure crystalline Vitamin D. You can either drop it into food and drink or dissolve it in the fluid I shall give you and inject it into people's veins. Injection is a very much quicker method, in fact it takes only an hour to take effect."

"Be careful," said Peter.

My brain was full of a cold, merciless hatred. To the intelligence of a man I had added the cunning and stealth of a cat. And, due to the extra-strong dose of the serum, whatever it was, that had been given to me, I was more cat-like and stealthy than any other among the Master's slaves.

I was a dangerous man. And a more dangerous animal.

TAKING the auto, I drove away. Going by night, it was quite easy for me to pass through the government

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lines. In fact, the confusion of the rapid advance of the human cats was such that I was able to drive straight from government territory into rebel territory without seeing a government soldier, except in the distance.

Once through the lines I soon made myself known to the first rebel company I met, and told my story. On I went. Very soon I was back at the big commandeered house that the Master had made his headquarters, and reported to my Major. The story of my supposed capture and escape I had to repeat many times. I was congratulated by everybody.

Then life went on much as it had done before I had been sent to spy in government territory, except that now I had to take care not to betray the knowledge that had come back to me. I looked around carefully. On my skill and cunning much might depend, even the very existence of my country.

I needed accomplices, but not too many.

And I needed to try out the effect of my injection.

Out of sight of everybody, I sprang upon and overpowered another man. I must have terrified him, for despite stringent regulations many cases had occurred of the Master's slaves springing upon and trying to devour one another. Several had been killed and even partly eaten in this way. The instincts of beasts of prey chafed at restrictions, broke out again and again.

I gave my victim an injection, as I had been shown, and watched what happened. At the injection he stopped struggling. He lay still. I waited for an hour to pass, assuring him that I would do him no harm.

The frightened look faded slowly from his eyes. He groaned.

"What has been happening?" he asked. I knew then that memory was coming back to him.

Very soon he remembered all. He had been a soldier in the American army until captured by the Master's forces, and then, "Everything seemed to go crazy." He was keen to help me in every possible way.

"Help me get into the kitchen," I said. "I mean to doctor the food on a big scale. Bring memory back to many of them, as I have brought it back to you. Tell me how I can do it."

"There is always a strong guard on the kitchen," he said. "I might possibly succeed in getting in through the window. Give me your needle."

Although I did not like parting with them, I gave him my implements of war. And I lay among the bushes watching his attempt on the kitchen.

As he had said, there was a strong guard. As he reached the window-sill a sharp voice rang out. A uniformed sentry roughly ordered him down.

"Do you know that you can be executed for that?" the sentry demanded. "All climbing is forbidden on pain of death."

"I wasn't doing any harm," pleaded the man I had treated. "I just felt I must climb."

I had the sights of my silent revolver lined on that sentry's head, and could have shot him easily, but I did not want to do anything that might give the game away if I could help it.

With a catlike spring, my accomplice suddenly had his arm around the sentry's neck. I saw the point of the needle go in and the plunger rammed home. The sentry reeled.

Other guards came running. My accomplice plunged into the bushes.

"Take these," he said, handing over needle and chemicals, and he was gone.

I STROLLED out of the bushes casually. The sentries asked me, ex-

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citedly, where the man had gone who had attacked their comrade. I sent them in the wrong direction. The sentry who had been injected now said that he felt much better. Interest in his attacker began to fade out.

I strolled casually about the yard, watching that sentry. I saw that puzzled, dazed look come into his eyes. I knew that memory had come back to him.

Then I walked up to him. I looked him full in the eyes. "I know what you know," I said.

He said, "I was a soldier in the regular army. What am I doing here? What has been happening?"

His distress was touching.

I said, "Your memory was stolen from you. I have given it back to you. Do you still wish to do your duty by your country?

"Only tell me what I can do."

"Let me into the kitchen," I said. "I will see that memory returns to many as it has returned to you."

"I will let you into the kitchen," he said. "But not through that window. Wait until I finish my turn of duty here. Then I will show you another way that you can go in without being seen by anybody."

Two hours later my two accomplices and I were in the kitchen, doctoring the food.

Then we slipped out and began to await events.

IT was difficult to mix with the other men calmly, as though nothing had happened. We practised shooting, joined in at the doctored meals, listened to orders that we knew would never be carried out.

It took so long for the vitamins we had put into the food to take effect that we began to get worried about it, but at last we began to spot men standing about with bewildered looks in their eyes as though they wondered where they were. Like men slowly waking up. And we knew that their memories were returning.

Discipline became slack. Sentries forgot their duties. Officers forgot their authority, let men do as they pleased as they puzzled over the problem of who they were and what they were doing.

My two accomplices mixed with them, helping them, telling them that they were soldiers of Uncle Sam still, that it was their duty to fight against the Master, not for him, and so on.

"O. K. boys," I said. "But before you start a mutiny that way see that the telephone wires are cut so that the Master can't send for reinforcements. I'll pop inside and see if I can upset the electricity supply and put the radio out of action."

I went through the doors.

Nobody was to be seen inside.

I found the main fuses unattended, and soon had all the electric current in the house cut off.

I came out into the corridor again. The house was oddly silent. An impulse to prowl came to me. I went up the stairs.

The guard was missing from the corridor above. I opened the door of the Master's room. There was nobody in it. I tried other doors.

Presently I found him. He was on all fours on the floor, naked. He had a tail about two feet long, and to it was tied a ball of colored wool. He was chasing this ball of wool like a kitten playing.

It seemed so strange to find the dictator of half America in this ridiculous attitude that I laughed.

At once he spun round and jumped to his feet.

"How did you get in here?" he spat

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at me.

"Your guards are neglecting their duties," I said. "I wanted to speak to you."

He jabbed a paw on the bell.

"You can ring," I said. "Nobody will answer you."

"Why not?"

"Because," I said, "memory has come back to them. They have found you out. You are beaten."

"Is thaa-at so?" he asked, very slowly and hissingly.

"I advise you to surrender to me. I am a soldier of the United States."

"Must I?"

"It will be better for you. Before long now your men will realize that they are all of one mind. Then they will attack you. A blind fury will fill them, a bitter thirst for revenge. They will exact vengeance on you for all that you have done."

"Attack me. Exact vengeance on me," he repeated, staring. "Well, if I must," he said, rising. And in the same moment he sprang.

I was not prepared for that leap. He was more of a tiger than a domestic cat. My revolver was knocked away. In fact, I forgot about it. In the moment of danger my instinct was to fight as a cat fights.

We struggled on the floor. My clothes were torn to shreds by his claws. He tried to rip open my stomach with his claws on his feet, strained for my throat with his long, tearing teeth. But I was stronger and younger than he. I remembered that I was a man. My fist thumped his head until I knocked him dizzy. Then I was soon on top of him and giving him a really stiff injection in his throat.

At that he stopped fighting.

LIKE angry cats we eyed one another, the Master and I. Injecting him had been a sudden idea, an arrow at a venture. His appearance had made me think that perhaps he was suffering from the same trouble as his slaves. In any case, there was nothing lost by trying it.

I sat, watching the effect come over him. It would take about an hour, as it had done with the other two.

Outside, through the window, I saw men talking. I saw others besides my two accomplices addressing crowds. And I knew that soon they would be swarming into the building, demanding explanations. Every moment their memories grew stronger.

The familiar puzzled look came into the Master's eyes. He groaned.

"Where am I? What has been happening?" he asked, again and again.

At last he said, "I was a scientist, and wealthy. I studied the endocrine glands of animals, particularly of cats. I thought that if men could see in the dark it would be an enormous advantage. There would be a saving of artificial light, fewer accidents.

"I isolated the hormones I wanted, and after a lot of work succeeded in producing them artificially. I tried them on animals without apparent harm, then I tried them on myself. Then all this happened.

"The hormones must have poisoned me somehow. I forgot who I was. I forgot everything except my artificial hormones and a scheme to conquer the world with an army that could see in the dark.

"And now we are going to get away from here," I said grimly. "Visit all your commanders. Tell them to stop fighting and order the men to surrender to the regular army at once."

He reached for the telephone.

"That's no good. I've had the wires cut."

"But I have the radio," he said.

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"I've put a stop to that, too," I said.

"What can I do?" he moaned in terror. "The soldiers are coming in. They are thirsting for my blood. They will kill me."

He was nothing but an anxious, frightened old man now. I was sorry for him; hated myself for the emotion. The animal in me fought with the man.

"There is a way out," I said. "I know, because I escaped that way before. We must get out of the window."

As the soldiers poured along the corridor, shouting, "Death to the Master!" two highly developed human cats leaped from window to window, up to the eaves, over the roof, down a drain pipe and away.

Peter's auto was unguarded, and in it we sped away.

We met the company coming to crush the mutiny, and we sent it in another direction. And we drove through the country, ordering every commander to stop fighting and surrender. Some of them were very surprised. Some of them the Master made to submit tamely while I injected them. I could have done with more of the Vitamin D fluid.

But as it was I forced the Master to stop the civil war pretty thoroughly.

That is the true story of the sudden end of the Second Civil War of the United States, and of the disappearance of the self-styled Master. For I took him away.

I was sorry for him. Nothing that he had done was he really responsible for: it was an accident that had happened to him. The authorities might not have looked at it that way. I was no longer a soldier. Therefore I took him and hid him.

Where we are now does not matter.

Sometimes I look at him, and see the inscrutable glare of the beast of prey come into his eyes. And I wonder. Have I been wise? Or is he even now thinking up some new scheme of world conquest?

Sometimes at night we go out together catching rabbits, ducks, partridges, pheasants or foxes. For we can still see in the dark, our hands and feet still have claws, and we are still remarkably swift, agile and silent.

The mark of the cat, or of the tiger, is still on us. It grows stronger in me. Someday I will lose my human pity, and then I will kill the Master. For he is *all* cat—and all treachery. Someday. . . . Someday—soon!

THESE THINGS CALLED GENES

NOT so long ago a young woman came to Johns Hopkins University and pleaded with Dr. John J. Abel that he save her from turning into a man! Dr. Abel found that the strange male characteristics of this young lady were being caused by an excessive secretion of the ductless glands. He further traced the trouble to a tumor. By removing the tumor Dr. Abel was able to send the girl away with the prospect of a happy normal life as a girl! But the real seat of all this trouble were those microscopically invisible rods of granules called genes.

All of our cell tissue is composed of hundreds of genes which play a leading role in the drama of life, heredity, and evolution. All of these genes are not alike and it is through different combinations of them that a prospective human being has blue eyes instead of brown, is a male instead of a female, is a blonde instead of a brunette, or is a great writer instead of a ditch digger! Today we know that the difference between a Charles Dickens and a moron is in the accidental combination of a few sets of genes!

Presumably genes are controlled by the ductless glands and it was by returning the ductless glands to a normal state that Dr. Abel gave the young girl back her normal life. Does this mean that in the near future we will somehow be able to control the ductless glands and in turn control genes? Not only does this possibility exist, but we may be able to go further and produce more than a mere superman—we may be able to produce men who will be talented writers, painters, statesmen, or engineers at will.

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

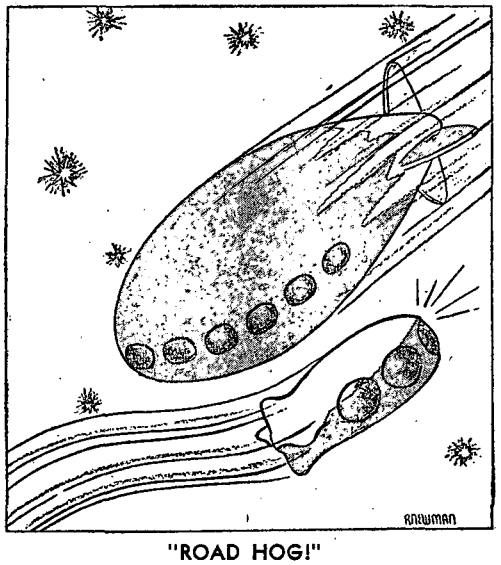
(Concluded from page 5)

tion that seem to characterize all his work. The manuscript reached us as the Nazis rolled into France.

It is a timely story and one of the best ideas in fantasy in recent months.

EACH time we have presented a cover by H. W. McCauley, it has been enthusiastically received. Now, this month, we believe we have the best cover this popular artist has ever given us. It was presented to your editor in sketch form, and even then was so fascinating that we urged completion without delay. When the completed painting came in, we were entirely justified in our haste. Because here, in our opinion, is a really fine bit of art work.

We called in Robert Moore Williams to look at it and asked him: "Does this suggest anything to you?" Apparently it did, for the cover story this issue, "The Golden Princess," seems to us to be a fitting story for a top-notch cover. And we'll stick our neck out and say we know you'll like it too—very much!



"ROAD HOG!"

A RATHER embarrassing thing happened to your editor recently. A Mr. E. Smith was announced, and we dashed out to pump the hand of the famed Michigan author. Aha, thought we, with enthusiasm, a "Skylark" story is virtually in our hands! "Skylark," if you don't know, is one of the classics of science fiction and fantasy of the old days.

So, after effusively gushing all over Mr. Smith, he managed to gasp out: "But I'm not Mr. Smith, if you mean Mr. *Smith*. I'm just Mr. Smith, from the insurance company, and I want eighteen bucks—right now!"

We warn you, Mr. Smith, if you ever call on us, you'd better have yourself announced as Mr. E. E. (Skylark) Smith, or we'll run away and hide!

PERHAPS for the first time since FANTASTIC ADVENTURES appeared, we are presenting an issue which most aptly lives up to its title.

In this issue, Williams, O'Brien, Pragnell, and Bern have written true fantasies, and we are quite anxious to get your reaction. Williams has written the type of story upon which the fantasy was based, and O'Brien has gone a step further and given us a humor yarn perhaps as good as any Thorne Smith ever turned out. If you don't laugh yourself sick at the antics of Hector Squinch, we'll agree that we are just a bit too ticklish. *We* are still laughing! Anyway, don't fail to read it and let us know if we're right.

IN the near future we are going to introduce a cover artist new to FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, but certainly not new to fantasy. He is Allan St. John, who so ably illustrated the Mars stories of Edgar Rice Burroughs, and the famous Tarzan books, until Burroughs' son took over the job. It will be the type of cover we've long wanted to secure, but haven't been able to assign to an artist who had the "feel" of that kind of illustrating.

MR. EDMOND HAMILTON called on our New York representative, the other day, Mr. David Vern, and the result is a humor novelette which is scheduled for our next issue. Its lead character is a *horse*.

WHICH more or less brings us to the end of the editor's notebook for this issue. But we have one more axe to grind.

We'd like to ask the readers to break down and pile into the editor with a barrage of constructive criticism on this issue. We've tried to give the book a new freshness, and it's up to you to tell us if we've succeeded. Will you? Thanks. *Rap.*

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Bluesnow swirled about the girl as she stood with guns leveled

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WORLD WITHOUT AIR

by Henry Kuttner

Jim Harding and Mat Pender faced sure death, from oxy-thirst. But they were certain they wouldn't give in to O-Corporation without a fight.

PEERING through the narrow, frost-misted window, Jim Harding bit down savagely on his pipe-stem as he saw the white tractor lurch into view. A flurry of bluesnow hid it momentarily; then the gale subsided. The storm was letting up. But it might be merely a lull, for nobody could make accurate weather forecasts on Planetoid 31, the most precarious foothold of human life in the System.

The tractor crawled into the shed, and the muffled thunder of its exhaust died. A space-suited figure emerged from the oval door in its side. The suit's transparent, dome-shaped helmet was immediately coated with blue rime, but Harding knew that his partner, Mat Pender, had returned—and with a message of failure. Pender's dragging, hopeless walk told its own story.

Harding's lean, hard-bitten face was suddenly flushed, and as swiftly became white. Without another glance out the window he moved to the gun closet and swung open the door. Strong hands clamped down like iron on the stock of a vicious sawed-off electro-rifle.

The pipe-stem cracked. Harding grinned bitterly and tossed the pipe aside. He hadn't allowed himself the luxury of a smoke for days. Not with the oxygen down to half a tank, and the supply ship overdue. Of course its tardiness was not accidental, Harding knew. Dain, owner of the O-Trust—the oxygen combine—had a definite purpose in making him wait for the oxygen that was synonymous with life on Planetoid 31.

Dain— Harding began to take the electro-rifle apart. A fleck of rust or a short circuit would be fatal now. Engrossed in his task, he scarcely heard the rumble of the shed door being closed and, some time later, the buzz that announced someone was in the airlock of the little cabin. When the signal rang again, Harding put the rifle under his arm and grudgingly ran some oxygen into the lock. Then he opened the valve.

Pender came in, coughing. His meaty red face was flushed, and brick-colored hair clung damply to his forehead. He started to speak, saw that Harding had turned away, and hesitated. Harding, oiling the firing mechanism, said;

"Well? Are you going to keep your bargain?"

Pender, unzippering his suit, forgot about it. He looked wide-eyed at the other.

"That's murder, Jim."

"It's self-preservation. And I gave

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you the chance you wanted. Morse couldn't spare any oxygen, could he?"

"He—I didn't ask him. He was down to a few tanks. He's got a wife and kids, you know—" Pender looked uncomfortable. "But maybe somebody else can spare—"

Harding swung around, fury glowing in his hard black eyes.

"You wasted enough oxygen and fuel taking the tractor to Morse's farm. There's nobody else for eighty miles; you know that." He waved down the other's protest. "Shut up, Mat. We're down to half a tank of oxy, and when the supply ship comes, we're going to take what we need—and not at Dain's new prices, either. I let you try to get some from Morse—and so what? Here!"

He thrust the rifle into Pender's unwilling hands.

"I'll need your help, if Dain sends his usual gang of thugs. Lucky we've got two guns."

PENDER laid the weapon aside and slowly crawled out of his suit. He found a cigarette, hesitated, and put it back carefully in the pack. Harding grinned savagely.

"Can't smoke," he mocked. "Wastes air. Yeah!"

"Morse feels the same way you do," Pender said. "He's laying for the O-Trust men. Says he'll shoot 'em on sight—he fired at me by mistake, in fact. But I was lucky."

"Good for Morse. If all the medicine farmers on this hell-forsaken world would get together, we could buck Dain. But he plays us off one against the other, cutting his oxygen rates to the guys who string along with him. And stringing along with Dain means giving him a half-interest in your farm."

Pender breathed a little painfully and leaned toward the window.

"Here's the supply tractor. Red ship, O-Trust insignia. Jim—" He turned abruptly. "This is murder!"

Harding sucked in his breath with an angry little sound. He rose, picked the rifle from the table, and glared at his partner.

"Listen," he said. "Just in case you don't know the set-up—nobody lives long on this planet without the O-Trust's regular delivery of oxygen. Dain keeps upping the prices. When I went to his headquarters last week—a hundred and eighty miles in a bluestorm—he said I'd have to pay a dollar more per cubic foot. I told him 'no'!"

"Of course," Pender muttered. "We don't make that sort of money medicine-farming."

"Raising plants and herbs that'll grow only on Planetoid 31—yeah. Dain wants a monopoly on the farming here. He offered to buy us out—and that blasted girl kept chiming in with him."

"She got in your hair, all right," Pender observed.

"Yeah. His new assistant, or something. I won't say she wouldn't wipe her feet on a medicine farmer — she probably would, if there wasn't a doormat handy. But here's the tractor. Remember — we need that oxygen!" Harding thrust the gun into Pender's big hands, and turned to the window.

The red ship had halted, and a space-suited figure was battling the wind toward the house. It went out of sight, and a moment afterward the buzzer rang. With a soundless oath Harding pumped air into the lock and stationed himself by the inner door.

"Have that gun ready," he cautioned, holding his own weapon steady. "Those thugs shoot first and talk later. Don't give 'em a chance."

He turned a lever, thrust the valve

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open, and with Pender beside him sprang into the lock. The first thing he saw was a murderous little electromatic leveled at his heart.

Almost he squeezed the trigger automatically. Then he heard Pender's grunt of surprise, and for the first time realized who his opponent was—a girl in a heat-suit, with the transparent hood thrown back over her shoulders, revealing a small, lovely face framed by chestnut curls.

It was the same girl Harding had seen a week before, in Dain's office. Now she had an electromatic in each hand.

There was no evidence of surprise in her cool glance. Frowning a little, she said, "Put them down, boys. Guns won't do you any good."

Harding didn't move. His eyes were searching. A mound of snow had been blown into the lock when the girl entered, and now lay in a blue heap at her feet. And Harding noticed a small bubble forming in the crust. . . .

HIS fingers shifted from the trigger, and the girl nodded in approval.

"That's it. Put 'em away and we can talk. I—"

There was a stir of sudden movement beneath her. The bluesnow churned as a sharp brown muzzle was thrust up into the warmer air. The girl involuntarily glanced down, and at that moment Harding leaped.

He smashed the rifle down on the slim arms, with enough force to knock the electromatics from the gloved fingers that held them. The girl gave a soft cry of pain and dived for the weapons. Harding stopped her, which was like stopping a pint-sized wildcat.

But at last he held a panting, unresisting prisoner, while Pender, having collected the various weapons, led the way into the interior of the house. Harding pulled at the girl's arm; she came along willingly enough. He sat her down in a chair and grinned at her.

"Saved by a snowhog," he mocked. "Lucky that pig blew in with you."

At the girl's involuntary look of surprise Harding bent to scoop up a small, soft-bodied creature shaped somewhat like an ordinary hedgehog, save that its skin was smooth and covered with large pores. It had crept out from the snowbank in the lock and wandered into the room.

Harding chuckled. "One of the few imported animals that survived on Planetoid 31. Came from Venus—they're used to an atmosphere heavy on hydrogen. But some of 'em got acclimated here, and they hibernate under the snow in winter."

He set the snowhog down on the table, amid the remnants of supper, and the little creature hastily waddled over to a glass half full of water and tried to cram himself into it. He failed, but managed to drink all the water.

Harding turned back to the girl, and his eyes hardened.

"So Dain sent you out, eh? Who are you, anyway?"

"The name is Susan Dain," she responded, ignoring Pender's low whistle of surprise.

"Don't tell me you went and married that buzzard," the big redhead requested.

"Fred Dain is my half-brother. I came out here to help him—"

"Two slave-drivers instead of one," Harding snapped. "I get it. He figured we wouldn't start anything with a dame—that we'd be pushovers and pay up with a smile. Or maybe he wanted to save his thugs from getting hurt."

Susan shrugged and started to light a cigarette. Harding knocked it from her lips.

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"We can't waste oxygen—till we get some more, anyhow. Where is it?"

"Outside in the tractor — with a couple of 'thugs'. It'll be delivered as soon as you pay for it. You know the price."

Harding nodded. "I see. Well, listen to this. We haven't got the money, and we've just half a tank of oxy. So tell your friends to deliver, *pronto*." He gestured to the radio set in the corner.

"Sorry."

"Okay. Then you'll stay here till the oxy's delivered."

SUSAN settled back comfortably in her chair.

"I'm 'way ahead of you. I'm a psychologist, farmer, in my own sweet little way—and if I don't return to the tractor in five minutes, it'll head back to headquarters. This is the last farm on our rounds."

Harding's brows contracted. "And you'll stay here—with half a tank of oxy? Know how long we'd last?"

The girl's foot tapped impatiently on the floor.

"You're not a good bluffer, man. You've got the money—and you'll pay up." She nodded toward the window. "See? There's the tractor pulling out."

It was true. The red leviathan wobbled slowly away into the blue, shifting curtain of snow, the mutter of its exhaust dying.

"Well?" Susan asked. "Shall I radio them to come back? Or—"

Harding didn't answer. He stared at the window. The drifts fell endlessly outside. The storm was rising. If there were only some way of extracting oxygen from the bluesnow itself! But electrolysis wouldn't work on the stuff; it was just another freak of this bitter, desolate world.

Pender got up and wandered uneasily around the room. Time dragged on. Finally Susan said,

"You'd better make up your mind before the tractor gets too far. Radios don't work well in these bluestorms."

Nobody answered her. She bit her lip angrily; then rose and moved about aimlessly. She was ignored.

"Make yourself at home," Harding said ironically.

Susan took his words literally enough, and her sharp gaze was probing as she strolled here and there. Eventually she went into the tractor shed which, since the door was shut, was safe enough.

When she returned, the look in her eyes had changed.

"Harding!"

"Yeah?" He turned lazily.

"Where's your oxygen?"

"There. That tank."

"But—the rest of it!"

"That," said Harding with bitter emphasis, "is all there is. There isn't any more."

"You—you must have a reserve supply! You wouldn't commit suicide by letting the tractor go off—"

Pender interrupted, "Lady, we're out of oxy and nearly out of money. Jim wasn't lying to you."

"Is that the truth?" The light eyes were probing as Susan turned to Harding. "Is it?"

"Sure. Next trip your pals will find us all here — frozen stiff and suffocated."

The girl's lips set tightly. She went to the radio, flung the switch, and began to call a message.

"Tractor Three. . . . Susan Dain calling . . . Tractor Three . . ."

A voice broke in, scarcely audible through heavy static.

"Miss Dain! We've been trying to contact you—can you hear us?"

"I—yes. What's wrong?"

"We cracked up." Static drowned

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the voice for a moment. ". . . gulley. Broke a tread and the oxygen's leaking. We're afraid it'll get to the exhaust and ignite. Our radio won't reach headquarters in this storm. Can you—"

Susan turned a look of silent inquiry on Harding, who shook his head.

"We can't reach far with this set. It's underpowered. And in a blue-storm—"

HE was interrupted by a sharp cry from the transmitter. The static faded, and the voice sounded startlingly clear in the silent room.

"The oxygen's caught! We—"

A bellowing report ripped out; then the radio was still, save for the crackling of static. Susan caught her lower lip between her teeth. Her hand went up to her throat.

"God!" Pender gasped. "Their tanks must have gone up!"

The girl asked, in a strained voice, "Do you think they have a chance?"

Harding snapped, "You haven't been on Planetoid 31 long, sister. Those poor devils are dead all over the place by now. It's blackout for all of us!"

Susan turned back to the radio, trying frantically to reach headquarters, 180 miles away. She gave up at last.

Harding favored her with a sardonic grin.

"Too bad Dain's not here instead of you. I hate to think of that rat still living after I've cashed in."

The girl had regained all her cool self-control. Frowning, she stared into space.

"Half a tank of oxygen — we can't make it to headquarters on that, can we?"

"Not in this storm," Pender told her. "The going's too rough. It'd take us twice as long to make the trip as it would under normal conditions. If the storm died, we might make it — I dunno."

"Isn't there another farm near here?"

The redhead nodded. "Morse's. Didn't you leave any tanks at his place?"

Susan scowled. "No. We got a radio from him—he said he'd shoot us if we came within range. I didn't believe him, but he wasn't lying. He—he'd planted mines, too."

"I know," Pender said, and exchanged grim glances with Harding. "Morse buried dynamite all around his place. He told me if I'd showed up a few hours later, it'd have been just too bad. He was laying for the O-Trust ship, all right."

"The man's mad!" Susan burst out.

Harding grunted. "Sure. He's got a wife and kids, and can't make more than a living out of medicine-farming. If he doesn't pay Dain's rates—*your* rates—he knows what'll happen. He's crazy, sure the poor devil."

"I feel sorrier for rattlesnakes," the girl said, in cold fury. "Medicine farmers . . . scum! Harding! I'll make a bargain with you. I don't want to die any more than you do. Let me use your tractor to get to Morse's place, and I'll guarantee you free oxygen as long as you stay on Planetoid 31."

Harding's eyes were veiled as he considered.

"You don't want to die, eh? Well—you'd never make it to Morse's. I'll take you up on that, sister. Mat! Snap into your suit."

"Huh?" The big man looked puzzled.

"We're pulling out—all of us. Morse has enough oxy to last us all for a week, and as soon as the storm dies we can radio headquarters. Come on!"

The three were galvanized into activity. Hastily they donned their heated

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suits and glassite helmets. Harding paused to scoop up the snowhog and carry the little beast outside through the lock. He stared around till he located a cluster of blisters in the bluish, frigid crust, and then dropped the creature there. It immediately burrowed down out of sight, its motions growing slower and slower as it disappeared.

HARDING stood for a moment staring at the spot where the snowhog had vanished. Queer animals. This one would hibernate all winter; and then migrate, with its companions, to the great swamps into which the slopes drained.

"Damned little hydrogen eater," Harding muttered, and joined the others in the tractor.

Pender had already taken the precious tank of oxygen into the ship. There was little space in the cramped quarters, and even when Harding mounted the small ladder to the transparent turret, he could see practically nothing through the murk. He swung himself uncomfortably into the control seat and sent the tractor lurching forward, dividing his gaze between a compass and the blue maelstrom outside. It would be easy to fall into a gulley without seeing it.

But he knew the path he must take, knew it by heart. Very often he had shuttled back and forth between Morse's place and his own. If he knew the way to headquarters as well, it would be possible to get there before the oxygen gave out. Well, that couldn't be done in the bluestorm. Their only hope was Morse. And Morse had set dynamite traps. . . .

Harding found himself thinking of the girl. Arrogant, self-sufficient, and officious. Far different from her half-brother Fred Dain in appearance, but in character quite like the owner of the O-Trust. Unpleasantly so. Harding's hard young face was bleak as the icy hell outside the ship.

He stopped the tractor and climbed down the ladder. Without a word he donned a heat-suit and released a scanty supply of oxygen into the feed tank high on the back of the suit. The others watched him from their seats.

"What are you doing?" Susan asked at last. Pender glanced at her.

"He's going to walk the rest of the way. If we took the ship any further, we'd be blown sky-high. A man on foot can get through safely, though."

"Oh," Susan said, remembering the dynamite mines Morse had laid.

Harding nodded at his partner, clamped the glassite helmet into place, and stepped into the tiny airlock, closing the door behind him. He turned on the heat unit, feeling a warm glow course over his skin. Oxygen trickled slowly from the little tank. Harding opened the outside door and was blinded by bluesnow that blasted in on him.

Quickly he stepped out on the surface. He sank to his knees before finding footing on solid crust. It was difficult to see more than a few feet in the filtered, pale light, but occasionally there would be a rift in the gale. During such a lull Harding made out the distant, squat bulk of Morse's farm.

He advanced warily. The white tractor vanished before he had gone far. The wind was the worst; it buffeted him with harsh, unexpected blows, and knocked him sprawling twice. Yet he kept on doggedly, making steady though gradual progress.

The veil of storm lifted momentarily, and sharply through the roar of wind Harding heard a faint crack. Simultaneously something tugged slightly at his shoulder. Again came the distant report, and snow puffed up at Hard-

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ing's feet.

A RIFLE! Morse was firing at the intruder, mistaking him for an O-Trust man. Perhaps he thought Dain's hirelings were returning after their initial failure to outbluff him. At any rate, Harding thought as he flung himself face-down in the snow, it would be suicide to keep on now.

He blinked smarting eyes. There was no radio on the tractor, nor did he have a portable set in his suit. Those things cost money, which medicine farmers didn't have. He tried clearing the rime from outside his helmet, but it was a futile task, nor could Morse have recognized him at this distance. In a bluestorm everybody looked alike. Harding felt a pain in his throat and blinked again. Funny. It felt like—

Like oxy-thirst!

His body tight with sudden apprehension, Harding flung back an exploratory hand. The oxygen tank on his back was empty. And his probing, gloved fingers found a long rip in the shoulder of the suit. His arm, he realized abruptly, was already numb from the bitter, freezing cold.

But this couldn't be happening! Not with oxygen and heat not half a mile away, both in the tractor and in Morse's farm. It was impossible irony. It wasn't real—

It *was* real — and the oxy-thirst clutched Harding by the throat!

Gasping, the man flung himself to his knees. The storm veiled him from Morse's eyes, so there was no danger of rifle fire. Yet the immediate peril was far worse. For Harding could not drag himself upright. Already weak for lack of air, he fell into the blue, feathery surface of the snow.

His left arm was numb and without feeling. The icy tendrils spiraled through his flesh, reaching for his heart. Simultaneously dry tentacles of pain clawed down from his throat. Like hands reaching, to clutch his heart and stop it. . . .

He strained to breathe. It was a choking agony. His lips drew back in a mirthless grin of torture. He tried to hold his breath, and when he could resist no longer, found no relief. A sick, whirling blackness was crawling toward him, folding down to smother him, and he was suddenly very tired.

Air . . . *for God's sake, air!*

He saw the blisters on the snow without realizing their significance. He must have crawled a few yards without conscious volition. And his distended eyes glared down at dozens of puffy blisters in the bluesnow. What did that mean? He had once known. . . . It didn't matter. There was almost a pleasure now in the pain that tore at him. Its sharp intensity was dulling. And he was sliding down, somehow. . . .

Blisters in the snow. Snowhogs. Small animals from Venus that lived on hydrogen. A snowhog that drank the water from a tumbler. . . .

Air!

Recklessly, with numb, stiff fingers, Harding tore at the fastenings of his helmet. He managed to get it part way off. His face suddenly was bathed in stinging flames. Paralyzing cold . . . but that didn't matter now. The only thing that mattered was air.

HE dug down in the bluesnow. The little animals weren't far. Harding broke through into a small cave and felt something indescribable breathe up at him—oxygen. He sucked it in with hungry greed, thrusting his face deep into the snow and breathing the life-giving oxy deep into his lungs. Renewed vigor flowed through him.

But the oxygen was gone now. He could get more—there had been a way.

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If he could remember. . . . The snowhogs, of course! They lived on hydrogen. They drank water and assimilated the hydrogen, releasing the oxygen as waste matter. The large pores on their skins excreted oxygen. And the bluesnow was H_2O, even though electrolysis wouldn't work on it.

But when the snowhogs hibernated, their metabolism was slowed down and they couldn't eat H_2O or release oxygen. The snowhog back at the farm had revived in the warm air. Warmth—

Harding turned on his heating unit full strength. He didn't know how long it would last, but it was necessary to take the chance. He scooped up a heap of snowhogs and bluesnow in both arms, hugged the small animals to his warming suit, and managed to lower his helmet till it covered the upper part of his face. The hogs began to wriggle and stir. A breath of oxygen drifted up and was caught in the helmet; Harding's starved lungs drank it in hungrily.

He staggered erect, still cradling his life-giving burden. The animals, warmed into sluggish activity, began to devour the bluesnow — and the heat speeded up their basal metabolism. Oxygen—waste matter to them—was released as they assimilated the hydrogen from the snow, and much of that oxygen rose into Harding's helmet. He waited a moment, breathing deeply, and then lurched forward down the slope. No use to head for Morse's cabin, of course.

The white tractor, capped by bluesnow, came into view. With a gasp of relief Harding flung himself into the lock and shut the valve after him. His stiff fingers found the warning buzzer. Pender must have been waiting by the stopcock inside, for immediately oxygen came hissing into the lock.

The inner door opened. Harding stumbled over the threshold, dropping the snowhogs to writhe excitedly on the floor. His face was a drawn mask.

Pender caught his partner by the arms.

"Jim! What happened to you?"

"Nothing," Harding croaked. He was tearing off his insulating garment. "Get me the other suit, quick! And a shovel!"

He snatched a fair-sized wooden box from a corner and emptied a miscellany of equipment from it.

Pender, jaw agape, was back with suit and shovel. Harding donned the former, nodded reassuringly, and valved some oxygen into it.

"Be back in a few minutes," he said, and departed, carrying the box and the shovel with him.

He did not go far. He began to dig at random in the bluesnow, and at last found what he wanted. After that he shoveled furiously till he had uncovered a patch of hard, frozen soil in which grew a cluster of spiky plants. They resembled cacti, save that their leaves were triangular and pointed. "Frenchfries", they were named by the farmers, because of the shape of their pulpy leaves.

HARDING carefully uprooted several dozen plants and then filled the wooden box with soil—a difficult task, even though the frenchfries had kept the ground from freezing entirely. With his burden he went back to the ship, keeping his face grim, though he felt like grinning in triumph. Inside the tractor cabin he stripped off the suit and tossed it to Susan.

"Get into it—quick!" And as she hesitated: "Damn it, do as I say!"

The girl obeyed silently, her lips firmly compressed. Harding pointed to the airlock.

"Outside. You've oxygen enough

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for ten minutes. Wait near the ship till the time's up. Then come back."

"B-but—"

"Don't ask questions!"

Harding's voice was a command. He waited till Susan had disappeared and the outer door had thudded shut. Then he turned to Pender.

"Come on, fella! We've got to work fast. I've an idea that may smash Dain and his O-Trust wide open."

The redhead stared. "Have you gone batty, Jim?"

Harding was ripping the heat unit out of the spare suit, the one Morse's bullet had torn.

"Hell, no. Shut up and give me a hand before that dame comes back. I don't trust her, and she'd give the whole show away if she knew what we do."

He bent over the box, burying the heat unit in the soil till it was invisible. The control button, however, lay just under the surface in one corner, and could be depressed by a slight motion. Then Harding picked up the snowhogs one by one and buried them in the soil. They wriggled a bit, but soon relapsed into tightly curled drowsiness. Harding covered them over and planted the frenchfries above them, till the pulpy brownish leaves almost hid the dirt that filled the box.

"What'd you say?" he asked, conscious that Pender had been speaking.

"The girl. Listen, Jim, we got her all wrong. That crooked half-brother of hers has been stuffing her full of lies. She's new on Planetoid 31, and Dain's made her believe we medicine farmers are the scum of the System. She started asking me questions about Morse and his family, and—and—well, the girl's all right. She knows the real set-up now, and she's with us."

"Yeah?"

"Sure. We had her wrong—"

Harding nodded toward the lock.

"Here she is. Let her in. But keep your mouth valved. I don't trust that girl; she's too smart. Let her in, Mat. The storm's dying a bit, and we're heading for Trust headquarters. Go on, don't stall!"

LUCK was with the medicine farmers. The storm did die, after an hour of intermittent gales, and the tractor went racing over the surface of Planetoid 31 to an empty horizon. Soon it grew dark, but powerful search-beams warned the travelers of gulleys and boulders in their path.

NOT long after nightfall they reached O-Trust headquarters, a group of well-built, airtight cabins, guarded by a miniature fortress that was the oxygen storehouse. The tractor lurched into a shed and halted as the door rolled down and air hissed through valves.

Harding paused long enough to take a can of salt from a shelf and place it in his pocket. Then, carrying the heavy box of dirt and frenchfries, he led the way out of the ship, Pender and Susan trailing him. The girl had been very silent during the trip and thoughtful as well. Harding knew that because he found himself stealing surreptitious glances at her. Too bad she was one of the Trusters—because it would be easy to fall for her, under different circumstances. Well, what the hell. . . .

Harding gave the box to Pender, and glanced at Susan's electromatic, which he had stuck in his belt. Then they passed through the locks and were in the office of the Oxygen Trust, a well-furnished, comfortable room with a big desk in the center and a smaller one against the wall. The latter belonged to Susan, Harding knew.

Behind the big desk sat Fred Dain. The slightest edge of a smile lay on

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him, and his smoothly shaven face and light fabric clothes contrasted sharply with the worn garments of the two medicine farmers.

Harding said, "Put it on his desk, Mat." And Dain's eyebrows rose as the grimy box was slammed down on polished mahogany.

"Well, Harding?" the Trust man asked quietly.

"Just this. I've found a way to smash you, Dain. You've made plenty of dough out of your oxygen monopoly. Well, that's all over now. You're washed up. I'm giving you a chance to sign over the O-Trust to the medicine farmers of Planetoid 31, collectively."

Dain's lips were still curled in an amused smile.

"Won't the farmers pay me a cent for my little business?"

"Yeah. A dollar. One buck, to make the transaction legal."

The seated man glanced at Susan and then back to Harding.

"If you've anything to say, say it. Or else get out."

"Right! You've got a monopoly on oxygen here. Correct? You're making money because the farmers can't get oxygen anywhere else. Right again. Now, suppose I'd found a way of manufacturing oxygen cheaply, so that every farmer could use it, and wouldn't need to buy from you."

Dain's eyes changed. He let his gaze fall to the box of plants.

Harding thrust his forefinger into the soil in one corner of the box—and felt the heat-unit control click softly over. He took the tin of salt from his pocket.

"This is the answer, Dain. Right under our eyes, only we never guessed what it meant till now. Frenchfries, growing wild all over the planet, just—weeds."

The Trust man said, very softly, "What are you driving at?"

Harding sprinkled salt over the frenchfries.

"Get a whiff of that!"

Dain leaned forward over the desk and sniffed. For a second his impassive mask dropped.

"Oxygen! But how—Let's see that can!"

He snatched the tin from the other's hands and tasted the white crystals.

"Sodium chloride," Harding affirmed. "Miles of it in the swamps here—not to mention the salt mines. All the farmers have to do is cultivate frenchfries, keep a supply of salt on hand—and they get oxygen. So—" His gaze lashed out. "So you'd better sign over the O-Trust!"

DAIN sank back in his chair, interlacing his fingers.

"Suppose I don't."

Harding felt his stomach drop like an elevator, but he kept his face impassive.

"Okay. Stay on, if you want. You realize how much the farmers love you. Right now they don't dare move a finger, because you've got a stranglehold on them through the monopoly. But when we have free oxygen on 31 and the farmers can go on living without you. . . .

"Do you remember Morse, Dain? And Andreasson, whose sister died of oxy-thirst while he was away in his tractor? Do you think your guns can keep men like that away from your throat, Dain?"

For a full minute the room was utterly silent. Then:

"Why do you want the Trust?"

"You've good, sound buildings here. It's centrally located. It's got facilities, and we can make it the headquarters of the new farmers' association."

Dain's face was flushed—by the increase of oxygen in the air. This, per-

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haps, turned the balance. Without a word he reached for paper and pen and scratched out a contract.

He signed it; Harding and Pender read and signed in turn, and Harding tossed a dollar across the desk.

"Okay," he said, pocketing the document. "I'll give you a week to clear out. If I were you, I'd go—far."

Without waiting for an answer, he picked up the box of frenchfries and started for the door. It would not do to leave them, for then Dain might discover the buried snowhogs, revived by the heat and now emitting oxygen.

The trust man said suddenly, "Wait, Harding," and stood up.

Harding turned, still holding the box. He saw Pender, at his side, stiffen. For Dain had an electro-gun in his hand, and it was aimed unwaveringly.

With a soft little cry, Susan leaped across the room to her desk. Harding did not look at her. He was wondering if he could drop the box and go for his gun. Pender, by fatal ill luck, was unarmed.

Dain said, "Probably you two are the only ones who know about this discovery. I may be wrong, but the chance is worth taking. If you two die—"

His eyes changed. Harding saw his finger tighten on the trigger, and the medicine farmer tensed his muscles for a hopeless leap to one side. It would be useless, he knew, for Dain was an expert marksman. In a split second the gun would—

Crack! The spiteful report snapped through the room. Harding almost felt the shock of the electrobolt, and found himself staring in blank amazement at the reeling figure of Dain, who went staggering back, shaking a hand that was a charred, smoking ember. The gun was fused on the floor.

Harding looked, then, at Susan. A drawer in her desk was open, and she stood holding a blue-steel electromatic that still trembled with the violence of the explosion.

Pender said weakly, "I told you she was on our side."

"T-that's right," Susan gasped—and quietly fainted.

Harding put the box of frenchfries down on the floor. He jerked his thumb to Dain, who was leaning on his desk and groaning.

"Fix him up, Mat. Bandage his hand. He's got to be ready to catch the next space-liner out of here. I've got to take care of my fiancée."

The redhead stared. "Uh — *what?* Your fiancée?"

Harding grinned as he lifted the unconscious girl in his arms.

"Sure. She doesn't know it yet, but —give her time, fella! Give her time!"

ELECTRICITY WITHOUT METERS

CHARLES P. STEINMETZ, the great electrical wizard, once predicted that electricity will someday be so cheap that it will not be profitable for electric companies to install and read meters. He also went on to say that with abundant electric energy at our disposal none of us would work more than two hundred and four hours in the year. This amounts to a six-hour day and we are not so far from that goal now. Steinmetz also predicted that one of the most troublesome problems facing future generations will be what to do with leisure time.

Although we still seem to be troubled with electric meters, Steinmetz's predictions concerning leisure and working hours seem to be coming true. However, leisure does not seem to be the problem most economists predicted it would. Instead we have in its place a vast new entertainment industry comprising movies, bowling, golf, etc., that has grown by leaps and bounds during the last few years.

But with science advancing every day, what does the future hold? Will we eventually have a six-hour day? A four-hour day? Or even an hour day? At any rate there is the ever-present possibility that maybe someday we won't have to work at all . . . of course, we'll have to press a button every now and then, but what's that?

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THE GIRL IN THE WHIRLPOOL

BY MILES SHELTON

"GREAT jumpin' oysters, it's a human!" Ebbtide Jones shouted within his space helmet.

The floating object spiralled closer. Sure enough, it had arms and legs and a chromium-bright space helmet, and a limp-space-suited body with a chest that bloused out like a girl.

It had small black space boots—that *kicked!*

"Alive! Well, I'll be soaked in salt water!" Ebbtide blinked through his visor.

In spite of its kicking and squirming, the object circled leisurely. Around the gravitational whirlpool it sailed until it was within thirty feet of the pole of the tiny planet. Ebbtide drew himself up on one elbow and kicked the signboard JONES to one side so he could see the sunlit object float past.

On its next round he picked up his improvised fishing pole and cast the

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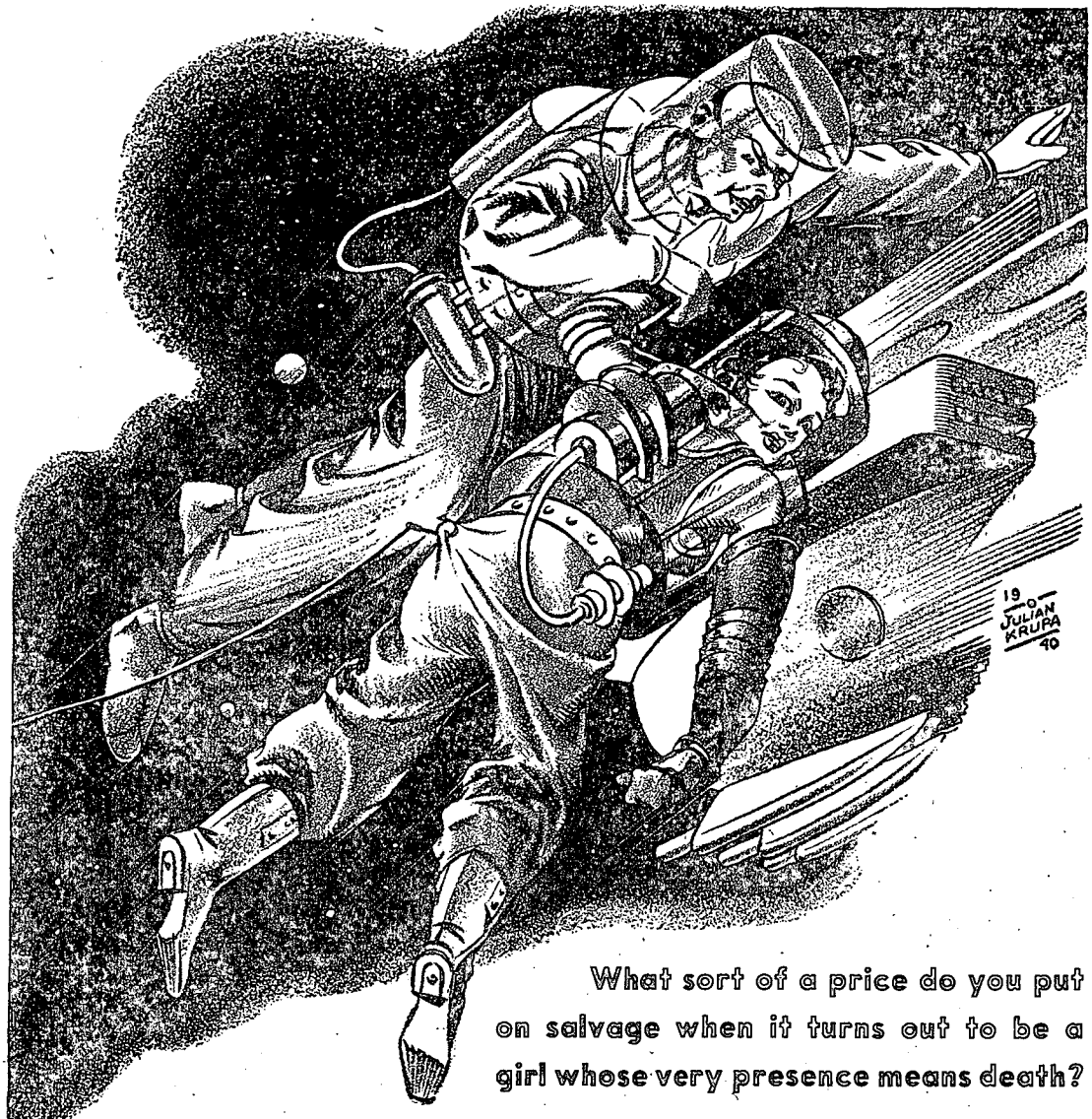

What sort of a price do you put on salvage when it turns out to be a girl whose very presence means death?

clothesline rope. The hook caught the floating body around the ankle. A yank from Ebbtide's wrist and down it came, light as a feather.

"Take it easy, fellow," Ebbtide yelled. "No use to kick."

He didn't expect his words to be heard and they weren't. The space suited visitor struggled like a hooked fish, kicked a clump of meteoroids, and bounced outward—just as Ebbtide himself had done the first time he had tried to find solid footing on this flimsy sky formation*—(See page 122 for foot note.)

"Take it easy! We're fresh out of gravity!" he cackled. The fellow's antics were a riot.

Another yank on the rope and Ebbtide had his hands on the struggling creature. He clutched the bright helmet and looked through the visor into a pair of blue eyes.

"Good lookin' helmet," he muttered. "Somethin' here worth salvagin', I reckon." He scrutinized the space suit and

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the late model oxygen tank, and felt the slick black boots. Then the squirming visitor landed a swift kick on his chest and Ebbtide did a hyperbola twenty feet out in space.

"Gol-darn it, why do they have to come alive?" Ebbtide growled as he floated back. "They're trouble enough dead." (He remembered the difficulty he had had salvaging the uniforms of twelve murdered Zandonian cops who had floated in a few weeks earlier.) "Come here, you—ugh—slippery eel—now I got you!"

He threw a rope around the arms and legs, hooked his own arm around the head, and dragged the form a fourth of the way around his planet. (He *called* it a planet.) He stopped before the air-locks of his space shack.

"This way in, fellow."

Inside the warm, air-filled cabin he removed his own space helmet. He untied his captive and took pains in removing the helmet so as not to mar its lustre. It was a beauty. Latest model. Worth at least $150 cash.

Inside it was a girl.

"HUMPH," said Ebbtide.

Some men would have caught their breath. Some men would have gasped, "Damned beautiful!" or "Where've you been all my life!" But Ebbtide Jones had been a beach comber all his life. He was a beach comber to the core. It was his beach combing urge that had brought him to this heavenly whirlpool where the wreckage from the spaceways floated in.

"Humph." His eyes swerved from the girl to the chromium-bright helmet. He took it and the oxygen tank to the window and examined them in the sunlight. He fished a notebook out of his pocket and made two entries: *Helmet*—$150. *Oxygen Tank*—$40.

Then he turned back to look at the space suit and the black boots that were walking around the room—or rather, half dancing, half floating. Undoubtedly that outfit had late model temperature conditioning.

The girl that stood before him took a deep breath and stretched out her arms and wiggled her fingers and shouted in a healthy musical voice, "I'm *alive!* I'm *alive!*"

"Yeah," said Ebbtide in the tone he had often used when a fellow beach comber would remark that a hail storm was coming.

"You've saved me!" The girl danced around as light-headed as a soap bubble. "You've saved my life!"

"Shush! Snail soup!" Ebbtide pushed her into a chair. "You just drifted in like all the wreckage does."

The girl glanced out the window at the sharply curved horizon.

"What is this, a halfway house, or something? How soon do I catch the next space bus back to earth?"

"It ain't, and you don't," said Ebb. He registered the space boots in his notebook: *Space Boots (ladies)*—$50. "Where'd you drop from?"

"Somewhere up that way, I think." She pointed upward speculatively. "Or maybe it was *that* way. Space all looks alike to me."

"Wreck?" said Ebbtide hopefully. His instincts were always on the alert like a hungry fish.

"Nervous wreck," said the girl pointing to herself. She swallowed the drink of water Ebbtide set out for her and helped herself to the food pills. "I got

* Ebbtide Jones was sole proprietor and lord of his Whirlpool in Space. (See AMAZING STORIES, November, 1939.) The pool was the meeting place of several eddies in space. Since all the debris in the surrounding thousands of interstellar space came together here, in time a shifting island in space was formed. Some of the island was actual soil, gravel, rock, but much of it was odds and ends of junk—metal plates, tube lights, space suits, etc.—Ed.

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scared of him so I walked out on him. That is, I stepped out."

"On who?"

"The fresh guy that picked me up for a joyride."

"From where?"

"Where I work. Down at the Chaw-Chaw Cafe. I thought he meant an airplane ride. Just a harmless spin over the city. I got in and we zoomed off. He said I'd better slip into this suit just in case of trouble, but I still didn't get it. I thought it was a parachute outfit, 'cause we were just supposed to be goin' for a spin. But when I looked out the window and saw the earth was gone I got suspicious. Wouldn't you be?"

"I am," said Ebbtide, writing. *Space Suit*—$110. More or less.

"Anyways when I looked over his shoulder and saw he had a dial set for some place a quarter way to Mars I knew that little Trixie Green had done the wrong thing. And that's when little Trixie Green got scared and jumped. I though I was still around home some place."

"Didn't this guy try to stop you?"

"He was dozing over a couple too many drinks, or I wouldn't have got away with it, 'cause Check—that's his name, Check Checkerton — he's nine-tenth's devil. He only showed the decent tenth at the Chaw-Chaw Cafe, but in the space ship I soon found out what kind of a guy he was. And I had to fight to keep my distance. You don't suppose he'll come here after me, do you?"

"I dunno," said Ebbtide. "He might figure this place out from his instruments."

THE girl gulped another drink and loosened her space suit at the throat. She scrunched down in the chair comfortably.

Ebbtide scowled and voiced his disappointment. "So there ain't any wreck where you came from?"

"No, just me," the girl chortled. "Gee, I guess I'm lucky to be here. If I can eat and sleep here till a boat comes along—"

"Maybe he was a girl snatcher," said Ebbtide thoughtfully. "They're operatin' from Venus. I read the warning in the papers."

"Girl snatcher. Gee. No wonder . . . You get a paper here?"

"I get all kinds of paper here," Ebbtide said dryly. "I get *everything*. Delivered. F.O.J."

"You got Trixie Green all right," the girl laughed coyly. "What's F. O. J.?"

"Free on Jones." Ebbtide hung the shiny helmet and oxygen tank on the cabin wall. JONES. That's the name of this planet."

"Never heard of it."

"It's a new one. Named after me. Ebbtide Jones. I named it myself. I'm the President here. 'Course, I'm the only one here, but I'm still the President."

"Ebbtide," the girl breathed. "It's a nice name."

"Stan Kendrick and I discovered this place. Kendrick figured it out from some rules of gravity or something. He was busy with other things so he let me have it for my own. It ain't very big, and it ain't very old, but by jumpin' oysters it's the richest planet for its size you ever saw."

"Gee, Ebbtide. I'm sure glad I dropped this way." There was a silence. "Aren't you glad too? You must get lonesome here all by yourself."

"Nope," said Ebbtide. He picked up his own helmet. "I'd better go take my monthly inventory."

"Then you—you aren't glad I came?"

He laid down his helmet and ex-

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amined his notebook. "I'm glad somewhere around three hundred and fifty dollars' worth. It depends." He squinted an eye at her open collar, trying to see how well the space suit was lined.

"You're a funny fellow, Ebbtide," said the girl. "Most men, the minute they lay eyes on little Trixie Green start in to tell her what pretty hair she has, or something."

"That hair ain't bad," Ebbtide admitted, jotting in his notebook again. "It might sell for a little somethin'."

"Say, are you a woman hater?" Trixie Green demanded. "The men at the Chaw-Chaw Cafe are always glad to see me, but maybe you're different. . . ."

"That's a swell space suit," said Ebbtide, coming closer. "Let's see how it's lined." He caught the corner of the open collar.

"Say-a-ay," said Trixie, "maybe you ain't so different after all." Just then, as Jones twisted around the label, the girl snapped: "Fresh guy!" and her hand swung out to slap him.

She swung and she missed. The effort threw her off balance and she bounced to the floor. Ebbtide grabbed her, threw her into a chair, and she went tumbling into the corner—chair, space suit, flying yellow hair and all.

"Listen, you," said Jones, tersely. "I don't want no trouble with you. You brought me enough so far. How long you think it's goin' to take that Romeo of your'n to figure out you're here? As far as I'm concerned, you're a dime a dozen, but that stuff you're totin' may make up somewhat for the mess I'm expectin' any minute."

The girl gulped and stared. Her eyes followed Jones' lanky figure as he marched about in his space suit, wearing a purple and gold military cap, going about his business methodically and paying her no more attention. He hung tags on her chromium-bright helmet, on the boots and on the collar of her suit. Then, around her neck he hung a little tag, saying: $7.50—Clearance.

"I'm goin' out to take my monthly inventory," he said, reaching for his helmet.

"Hey, wait a minute!" she squealed. "When do you take your salvage back to earth?"

"Whenever my buddy Kendrick comes by in his ship to pick me up," said Ebbtide.

"Okay, I'll be ready."

"Don't bother. *You* ain't goin' *this* trip."

"I—er—huh?"

"'Course not," said Ebbtide. "I've only got so much space on that ship and I got contracts to fill all the space I can get. If I go back on the contract, that's the end of me. Space is valuable."

"H-m-m-m. So I'm not valuable!" The girl clambered to her feet and shook the hair out of her eyes and planted her hands on her hips.

"No," said Ebbtide, grinning, "not that I can figure out. If you've got any gold watches or rings I can make room for them. But I've got a pile of jewels out here, and space contraptions that'll sell high. There won't be room for everything. The best I can do for you is maybe cut your hair and take your space clothes and your gold teeth —if you've got any—"

"Why you nasty thing! I hate you! I just plain hate you!"

Ebbtide walked back to the belligerent creature without a word and calmly marked her down from $7.50 to $3.50. Then he went out to take his monthly inventory.

SEVERAL hours later, Ebbtide Jones was sitting near the equator of his planet, lazily casting his fishing line at

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the flock of small meteoroids that coasted in from the void, when Trixie Green came out and sat down near him.

He glanced at her, mumbled, "Have a nice nap?" and went on casting. She worked with the radio dial on her space suit until she got his wave length. She could hear his gentle breathing.

"Ebbtide," she said plaintively, "did you get your inventory finished?"

"Yep."

"Couldn't you get it figured out that you can take me back to earth with you?"

"Nope. It didn't figure out that way."

Trixie listened to Ebb's slow easy breathing. No change. She tried again. "Ebbtide, if I was *some* girls you know, instead of just Trixie Green that works in the Chaw-Chaw Cafe, you'd take me back, wouldn't you?"

"Nope," said Ebbtide. "Not that I know of. Girls is all the same to me."

"Honest?"

"Honest."

The sun slipped over the horizon and everything went dark. Except the floating meteoroids that were drifting in from outer space. They were lighted up like a host of moons.

"It's turned night!" Trixie gasped. "Gee, it's beautiful. All those moons."

"Like 'em? I'll make you some more." Ebbtide picked up some small spherical stones and hurled them out into space far enough to catch the sun's gleam. Yellow ones and green ones. They oozed out like toy balloons.

"Here goes a red one," said Ebbtide. It caught the sun and glowed like a bloodstone floating across black velvet.

"Gee, it's romantic." Through the radio the girl's voice was like the poetry hour. "You never see nights like this back on the earth. It'd be a wonderful place to make love, wouldn't it?"

"I don't know. I never made love," said Ebbtide.

"I'm going to stay out all night and watch. Don't let me keep you up, Mr. Jones, if you want to go home and go to bed."

"If I went to bed every night here, I wouldn't get anything else done," Ebbtide grinned. "Is this the first night you've seen? Where you been the last three hours?"

"Asleep," the girl answered.

"You've slept through six nights and six days."

"No! Not really!"

"Uh-huh. They're only fifteen minutes each here on Jones. One earth hour is two days and two nights, roughly. So you get about fifty days here to one earth day."

They watched the varicolored moons swinging and bumping and turning black as they fell out of the sun's rays. Soon day broke again.

"That was grand!" the girl exulted. "Little Trixie Green could just sit and watch those moons and stars forever."

"If you like it so well," said Ebbtide, "you can walk along with it and stay in the night all the time. You can circumnavigate this globe in thirty minutes. I've fixed paths and ropes to hang onto all the way around."

Trixie was still breathing poetry. "Couldn't *you* just sit and watch it forever, Ebbtide?"

"NO," said Ebbtide, "not unless there was a wreckage driftin' in."

"You aren't a bit romantic. But *I* am, and when you go back to earth and leave me here, I'll just go on watching these pretty moons forever."

Ebbtide shook his head. "You can't do that."

"Why not?"

" 'Cause some day this little sky ball's gonna shake apart. When the big planets get farther around, this gravity

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pocket'll melt like a hailstone in hot water and everything'll slide outward."

"Gosh! Where'll *we* be then?"

"*I'll* be on my way back to earth on Stan Kendrick's space boat. Me and my salvage. Most likely *you'll* be takin' a swell ride through the universe."

Trixie Green's poetic manner vanished. "Oh, no. No, not me. I've had all the riding across the universe I want. I'm full up on universe. Space riding's all right if you like it, but check me out. Too far between hamburger stands."

A gleaming helmet came swirling down out of the sky and Ebbtide hooked it. It was a twin for Trixie Green's.

Ebbtide Jones looked grim as he examined the helmet. "This fellow Checkers—" he began.

"Check Checkerton," Trixie corrected.

"Did he carry any extra helmets that you know of?"

"He had a couple of cases of them—why?"

"'Cause I been lookin'—" he started to say. Then he said, "'Cause if he wanted to throw out something so he could take after it and follow where it went—this helmet would be about the right thing to throw."

"Oh!" said Trixie.

"Yeah," Jones agreed. "I don't know when, but my hunch is that it's going to break soon. Maybe you can stick around and keep fishing while I go over my books."

But three more of the swift nights passed, and then Trixie fished out two things that excited her. She got them and leaped and tumbled to the shack to place them in Ebbtide's hands—two more chromium-bright helmets.

EBBTIDE came into the space shack, hung up his helmet, and donned his purple and gold military cap. He was frowning.

"False wind," he said, referring to the helmets. "I've been watchin' for the last ten days, and not a sign of your Check. Then again, I don't like the feel of the island much."

"Ten—oh, you mean ten *Jones* days. Say, Ebb—"

The girl was in the further room of the shack, which was a complete space ship kitchen that had once floated in intact.

"What's the smell in this place, Ebb? Something dead?"

"You mean that cheese I'm thawing out? It sailed in frozen like an iceberg a few months back. *Jones* months."

"I'd say it's plenty thawed," said Trixie. She found the box of cheese and pried the lid off. "Want to eat it?"

Ebbtide shook his head. He was particular about eating his cheese with pie, he said, and so far no pies had drifted in. Food galore, but no pie.

"I'll make a pie," said Trixie, and she went to work. "It'll be a lemon pie. There's lemons and lard and flour here, and everything I need. You like lemon pie, Ebbtide?"

The girl felt a string tighten at her throat and turned to find the monarch space comber marking up the tag that hung around her neck. From $3.50 to $23.50.

For a moment, Ebbtide's smiling eyes met hers, and he was surprised to see how clear they were, and how deep. But he turned away and said nothing. He sat at the window to keep watch on the starry landscape—or skyscape, as he called it. But when the savory odors of lemon pie crept over to him—pie, the rarest of delicacies on the planet JONES — Ebbtide grinned and went for a new price tag. And when at last he sank his teeth into the finished product, he plunged like a Wall Street investor: he wrote, in large black numerals—$69.75.

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The girl's blue eyes beamed. "Now do I go back to Earth with you when you—"

"No," said Ebbtide, munching his pie contentedly.

"Why not?"

Jones hesitated a fraction of a second. "No room. Like I told you, you're too bulky for your value."

"Me bulky? Little Trixie Green too hefty? You can't tell me that!" Her eyes flashed with anger now. Ebbtide's gaze roved over her lithe form.

"I got a chest of jewels no bigger'n you," he said, "that's worth millions of dollars. Nope, you don't go. Just your space suit and your jewelry and maybe your hair, if you like."

"You'll have a sweet time getting my hair!" She tossed her head defiantly.

"I'll get it the next time you sleep," he said, helping himself to another piece of pie and a liberal quantity of cheese.

"Then I won't sleep any more," she snapped.

"If I can depend on that," said Ebbtide, "I'll send you out to keep watch on the skies."

The girl straightened up her kitchen in silence. She refilled Ebbtide's plate with pie and cheese, then placed her elbows and nose against a window and contemplated the skyscape.

"If he does come," she said, and the same shudder was in her voice that always came when she spoke of Check Checkerton, "and if he tries to kidnap me again, what would you do, Ebbtide?"

"Depends . . ." said Jones. "Now you goin' out to watch for me?"

"Yes, I'm going."

EBBTIDE awakened to a soft purring voice.

"Ebbtide." The girl stroked his sleeve. "I've been keeping watch on the skies for you, Ebbtide."

The space comber groaned and demanded to know whether anything had happened.

"Yes, lots," said the girl in her most poetic tone. "The nicest nights and the brightest stars. But Ebbtide, won't you come out and make some more moons for me?"

A little patient cajoling and the lanky space comber yielded to the girl's request. They trailed along the equatorial path, walking lightly and clinging to the ropes and rails. Trixie's voice chattered musically through the radios.

"It must be wonderful being a beach comber and a space comber. Always on the lookout for the next surprise package. Gee, I think it's thrilling. I wish I could be a comber too, Ebbtide."

"Us combers usually work by ourselves. Sure, we got an organization and we're kinda scientific, but the way I figure, I ain't takin' on no more partners."

Ebbtide settled down among a clump of rounded meteoroids. He gathered up one of them, a barrel-sized ball, and pushed it out into space. The planet rotated into night, and the gliding ball could be seen as a silvery crescent.

"I've been having some wonderful thoughts, Ebbtide," said the girl, settling down near him. "How we could make this the grandest planet. You'd be the king of it, and everybody'd do whatever you tell them. Gee, you'd be grand!"

"What do you mean, *everybody?*"

"Well, I've been thinking—how long are we going to be here?"

"Maybe another Earth month. Maybe even a year," said Ebbtide. "Though it don't feel so steady. Still, Kendrick, the guy that's comin' after me, can tell from his figures. He'll leave me as long as it's safe."

"And it might be safe a whole Earth year?"

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"Maybe. As long as things are fallin' *in* instead of fallin' *out,* there's plenty of time."

"Gee," the girl breathed. "Then it ought to work."

"What?"

"Why you could have a whole kingdom of space combers for your own. A whole tribe."

"How?" Ebbtide kicked another potential moon up through the blackness. When the sunlight caught it, it was sparkling gold. It reminded Ebbtide of a king's crown. "How could I have a whole kingdom?"

"Well," said Trixie, taking a deep excited breath, "say we're to be here an Earth year—you and me. Well, for every Earth day we get fifty days, because things happen fast here."

"Faster'n hungry sharks."

"All right, then for every year we get fifty years—and in fifty years you could have children and grandchildren—a whole tribe of space combers—all looking up to you as—"

"Hold on there, not so fast. What kind of a hurricane is this?" Ebbtide started to reach for his notebook with a vague feeling that this deluge of figures ought to be checked on paper. But it was still a few minutes until daylight. He tried to scratch his head but his space helmet interfered.

"You could be king instead of President, so you could make all the laws you need, to make Jones a great planet. And if you pass a law that we get married—"

"Grandchildren," Ebbtide mumbled, "a whole tribe. . . .Great spoutin' whales. And me the *king* of JONES."

A LONG silence. The sun peaked over, the planet rotated into high noon and on toward evening. Ebbtide scarcely moved. He lay with his hands locked behind his head and his long legs propped over a rock, staring into the void as if he had forgot the girl was watching him, except that now and again he turned to look at her furtively.

"Nope," he said finally. "It don't figure out."

"Why not?"

"Because it don't. Now take me, I've got beach comber in my blood from way back. That's why I'm where I am today. But if I was to marry you—nope, it's too risky. Those grandchildren might turn against space combin'. They might want to take up counterfeitin' or politics or singin' or preachin'—and then I'd have to shoot 'em to save the family reputation."

"Wait a minute!" the girl cried. "You aren't the only one that's got heredity. My dad was a second-hand dealer—"

"Huh?"

"From a long line of second-hand dealers. And that's not so different from collecting sea salvage. So there!"

"Another thing," said Ebbtide, as they turned into the night. "How'd you have that time business figured out?"

"Well, if every hour is two days," said the girl in sing-song, "and every day is fifty days, and every year is fifty years—and if Ebbtide Jones and little Trixie Green are going to be here fifty years—"

"Hold the hurricane!" Ebbtide interrupted. "I said it might be not even a month. It might just be—"

His words died. He was staring at the moon, the silvery one he had tossed out the day before. The girl saw it too. Instead of floating back it seemed to hang there, eighty or a hundred yards out. If anything, it was drifting away slowly.

Then the golden moon came into view. It was definitely moving—*outward!*

Ebbtide sprang to his feet. A stone

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that he kicked up floated up past his shoulder.

"Where you going?" the girl cried.

"Gather things."

"Can I help?"

"Yeah," Ebbtide retorted. "Don't take your helmet off. Ain't safe the way the shack's starting to leak. Go to the cabin and sleep. I'll be in to clip your hair in a few minutes."

AND still there was no sign of Stan Kendrick's space boat.

In a few minutes, meteoroids and floating trash piles brightened the space around the planet JONES. The gravitational whirlpool was slowly slipping into reverse, and little by little its substance would break away and follow other gravitational paths.

Ebbtide's stacked rows of salvage strained silently at their hitches. A squat space-cannon snapped a rope and wafted upward. By the time Ebbtide noticed, the weapon was beyond his fishing line. The network of ropes around the frail, mongrel planet's equator was holding as an anchor, but its endurance was limited. And Jones didn't know the limit.

Holding firmly to the ropes, he plodded around his little world several times. He didn't know whether to feel more or less anxiety as the void remained empty. There were two ships he was expecting now. . . .

A shadow crossed the corner of Ebbtide's vision. He spun about quickly to see a space flivver glide past in the weak eddies of the pool. Jones adjusted his helmet and walked down to meet the newcomer.

When the flivver landed, a husky man of Ebbtide's own lean height clambered out. He clutched at the ropes and railings and fiddled with his earphones, trying to tune in to Jones. When he hit, Jones spoke up: "You come just in time for a clean-up sale. Lease is expirin' any minute now and I got some of the hottest bargains in the system."

"Any whiskey?" the stranger asked.

"All you want," said Ebbtide, pointing to a huge pile of bottled stock in tempo-conditioned cases. He thought he knew this stranger.

"You underestimate me, buddy. How much for the lot?"

The customer seemed to be a good one, and ripe for business. He bought the whole supply of liquor, all the firearms, and large quantities of food, oxygen and fuel. He looked about, this way and that, as if—

"Somethin' else?" said Ebbtide.

"There might be," said the customer. His roving eyes kept returning to the space shack. Bloodshot eyes, Ebb noticed, scrutinizing the stranger's visor. Where had he seen him before?

"Nice line of uniforms you got there," said the stranger, idly. "They all float in dead?"

"The twelve Zandonian cops did," said Ebbtide. "The three spacemen's suits was still kickin' when I yanked 'em off. Case of three tough guys."

The husky customer looked the lanky Ebbtide over from head to foot. "You're pretty tough yourself, huh?"

"Enough," said Ebbtide. "Anything else you want?"

"Yeah. Got any new space helmets on hand?"

"No," said Ebbtide.

"No?" The stranger leaned forward a moment. "Wouldn't happen to have a girl around, would you? Somebody with a couple of my helmets?"

"No."

The husky stranger looked around the circular horizon. "Then I figure maybe there'd be a corpse lyin' around on the other side of this ball of rocks somewhere."

"I've combed every inch of this

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planet for everything," said Ebbtide.

"Yeah? I think I'll take a look around."

No sooner had the stranger disappeared down the equatorial path than the lights in the space shack flashed on. Ebbtide clambered for the air locks as fast as he could go. It was perilous going.

More perilous for Ebbtide than for the other. For Ebbtide had developed fixed habits of leaping along over the paths, knowing that the gravity would pull him back down. This sudden reverse in gravitational forces checked him at every move.

At the entrance to the air locks Ebbtide met Trixie coming out. Ebbtide seized the girl by the wrist and pulled her back into the cabin.

"Hey," she said, "it's him — Check Checkerton!"

"I know. Now get back in the shack and lay low. Go to sleep. This might be worth a lot of money to me."

The girl was defiant. "If you think little Trixie Green is going to pretend she's asleep while you—"

"Listen, shark bait," said Ebbtide, "I'm gonna tell you somethin' an' you've gotta do like I tell you, see!"

Ebbtide turned off the lights. There was sufficient light from the outward-bound moons for the girl to give him a suspicious look through her visor. "What do you want me to do?"

"Breathe deep," said Ebbtide. He was perched behind her, and he reached his arms through hers. "Breathe again . . ."

On the last count his arm pressed down to cut off the deep breathing as before, and he started to carry her sleeping form to the farther room. But Trixie Green was not asleep. Her arms caught him around the head and she looked into his visor. She was breathing audibly.

"Gee, Ebbtide, you're strong. The way you manhandled me, you must be in love with me. You *must* be!"

"What th' snappin' turtles—"

"And I love you too, Ebbtide!"

There was just enough sunlight sifting in by this time to reveal the third figure as a dark shadow entering from the air locks. Too late Ebbtide realized that his recent conversation with Trixie had carried to Check's radio as well.

"Got no women, huh!" Checkerton barked. "Well, if it ain't my little waitress! I been lookin' for you. I've got a reserved seat waitin' out here in my flivver."

"She's my property," Ebbtide said quietly. "She floated in."

"Then I'll buy her," said Checkerton. His eyes were on the price tag around the girl's neck. "I've got no more use for money. I've got plenty of use for company. Here's your price."

"The price is two thousand," said Ebbtide.

"The sign says something else."

"It's a misprint. Two thousand cash."

"It's a deal." Checkerton produced two thousand dollars in bills. Ebbtide Jones slapped it down.

"Changed my mind again," said Jones. "No sale."

He had remembered the stranger, after all.

EBBTIDE slapped the money *down,* relatively speaking. It fell and scattered over the ceiling—upon which the three figures were now standing. The space shack was like a cabin hanging from the underside of a huge wobbly balloon.

Check Checkerton scowled through his visor. Ebbtide met his glare. Trixie Green held her breath.

Then Checkerton bent to the ceiling on which he stood, and his fingers swept up the bills.

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"It's no skin off my back," the husky man growled. "If you don't want to *sell* her—" he stuffed the bills into a pocket and came up with a gun—"I'll take her as a gift!"

He waved the gun barrel in Ebbtide's face. It gleamed menacingly—and expensively. Ebbtide wondered how much it was worth—and how easy it went off. Suddenly he twisted to one side, and the cabin swung with him, shakily.

"Look out!" Ebbtide yelled. "She's goin'!"

Sudden alarm peered from the goggled eyes of the stranger. He rolled with the shack and then suddenly cast himself in the opposite direction, as if to balance it. At that moment, Jones came flying back across the room and crashed into Checkerton. His right hand swung up to Checkerton's jaw, and his left hammered the other's right hand. With a cry of pain that echoed through their receivers, Ebbtide and the girl saw Checkerton drop the gun—

Drop? It didn't drop at all. It merely hung in air a moment and then began to float away. It hit the ceiling and lay there against it. With a surge, Checkerton flung himself to the ceiling—and there was Trixie Green, jumping after him!

Together they hit the ceiling of the shaky hut with a heavy impact, and Jones, several feet below, saw the beams give, then part, then begin to head slowly into space.

At that moment, Jones lost interest in the fight for the gun. The Zandonian treasure chest was lifting and floating leisurely out of the door which had wrenched open. The little air that had been left in the shack rushed out with celerity enough to make a breeze, pushing the chest even faster. The breeze was acting as a current in a placid stream.

With a whoop, Ebbtide Jones braced himself against the floor and jumped out of the shack. In his earphones he could hear the girl and Checkerton howling about something, but he was busy. He floated chin-first to the heaving ground outside, looked wildly about for his fishing pole and lunged for it as it floated up to him. Then, running along the snaking walk, he was after the chest.

The chest, with a mind of its own, was making off in the general direction of Sirius when the hook on the fishing line nipped its handle. Jones was sweating rivers by then. He threw a short loop of rope around it, tied it to the lines of the walk, talking to himself. "That'll hold as long as there's a planet here, an' if that ain't goin' to be for awhile, it won't make any difference—where I'll be."

"Ebbtide!" came a scream in his earphones. "What are you talking about? This ape's got me and he's—oo-ooof!"

"I'm comin'!" said Ebbtide into his speaker. "An' you better turn your earphones off. You shouldn't be listenin' to the kind of talk that's comin' from that guy."

Running along the planking, Jones saw Checkerton and the girl ahead of him, heading for the space flivver. The little hybrid planet was shaking now as if it had an ache in its middle, and the going was tough.

And now, suddenly, the space flivver was lifting by itself. Its nose swung about and the bow lifted, and it began to head up into space. A series of oaths ripped through Jones' earphones, and as he ran toward the two, he saw Checkerton crouch.

The next instant the man had leaped toward the ship, dragging Trixie Green with him by the hand. He barely caught the outside rail of the flivver and he held on. Behind him, the girl was gy-

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rating and kicking, and so, for the moment, the man, the girl and the flivver began to move out in a threesome.

That was when Jones saw the battered nose of Stan Kendrick's boat coming butting in. It heartened Jones somewhat, but he still had his work cut out for him. "Won't have space unless I hold him till Stan gets here," he muttered. "And I got to hold him." And with that, he swung the fishing pole and then threw the line. The hook flashed out—and caught Trixie Green in the seat of her pants. "Must have disconnected her speaker," Jones observed, when no responding howl greeted his efforts.

Now he began to pull the catch in. It was strenuous work. The flivver was pulling out and Jones working his line in. Suddenly Checkerton turned around and took in the scene. Abruptly he let go of the girl's hand and concentrated both hands on the flivver's rail.

Before Ebbtide could cry out, Trixie had lunged and caught Checkerton's foot. And she wouldn't let go. Checkerton thrashed and spun, but the grip on his leg wouldn't give. He let go one arm and tried to reach the girl with his free hand. The flivver lurched about wildly before he lost it altogether.

So it was that Ebbtide Jones, bent almost in half, and relieved only at the end by Stan Kendrick, pulled in the three of them. By then he had taken Kendrick's gun from him and was pointing it at Checkerton.

Trixie Green disengaged herself from the hook and scurried off to the remains of the shack. When Jones and Kendrick, leading Checkerton, reached there, they found her holding together a dozen odds and ends that were on the point of departing. She flipped in her receiver. "Let's start loading and get out of here," she said, her eyes bright with excitement.

"GEE," said Trixie, shaking her hair into place as she took off the helmet, "what a lot of moons. All of them taking off for another ride." She looked out of a porthole in Kendrick's boat. "I guess that's the end of JONES," she added sadly.

"How's the flivver ridin'?" Ebbtide called out.

Stan Kendrick came forward to him. "Snug as a bug," he grinned. "I got it towing along as nice as you please. I only hope that Checkerton doesn't get loose back there."

"He won't," said Trixie. "Not the way I tied him up."

"Mind telling me what this was all about?" said Kendrick. "I never saw so much action for strange reasons in my life."

"Yeah," Jones grinned, facing the girl. "What made you hold on to that Check friend of yours?"

"You had your speaker on, didn't you?" she countered. "The way you kept talking to yourself, I knew you wanted him for something, so I held on. But what?"

"Salvage," said Jones.

"You mean the way you're using that flivver to haul a lot of this stuff?" said Kendrick. "Fast thinking. The way that planet went to pieces we'd never have been able to take everything on this trip."

"Well," Ebbtide drawled, "partly that. And partly the fact that this Checkerton guy has a price tag on him. There's a reward out for his capture."

"Holy Jupiter!" Kendrick exclaimed. "What's this? And how in the name of sixteen Mercurian saints do you know so much of what's going on where you're stuck away out in nowhere?"

"Salvage," said Ebbtide. "Couple of months ago—JONES months, I mean—our organization—"

"What organization?" Trixie asked.

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"Salvagers and junk-men, of course. I been tellin' you that this kind of business is a science these days. Anyways, the organization got out a bulletin to all of us tellin' about how there'd been a robbery in one of the Spaceways department stores. That meant we could expect some stuff to be comin' in from guys who wanted to use us as fences—you know, places they could sell it. 'Course, that ain't allowed. Well, when I see a guy that's got helmets enough to throw around for guide markers, and all he'd got is a flivver, that adds up."

"But how do you know there's a reward out for him?" Kendrick asked.

"On account I was stuck once before. Couple of years ago—JONES years, I mean—somebody dropped in on me and sold me a lot of oxygen tanks. Good buy, too. Well, Stan, you remember what happened to them tanks. The government confiscated 'em, and said there was a cash money reward waitin' for the guy who had stolen 'em in the first place. An' that was the same guy, only I couldn't remember right off. Not till he flashed them bills, wantin' to buy Trixie."

"What do you mean—buy Trixie?" said Kendrick, sitting down.

"That part of it's a long story. But the bills—they was the same ones I'd used to pay him. They look all right, till you examine them. Then you kind of notice that they're JONES money, an' they ain't no good off that planet. 'Course, as President of the planet, I had a right to print my own currency, an' it kind of kept the trade comin' back."

"Comin' back?" Trixie cried. "I brought him and I held on to him, even though that hook was hurting my feelings—and I'm getting half of that reward! And what did you mean by goin' after the treasure chest when that lug was choking the life out of me on the ceiling?"

"GEE," Jones said, looking through a porthole. "I guess you're right about them moons lookin' so nice. What's that? The chest? Well, I figured any girl that goes divin' after guns is goin' to be able to take care of herself—and that chest is valuable."

"Well, so am I!" howled Trixie. "And you're goin' to realize that when I get half the reward."

"I been thinkin' about that."

"H-m-m-m."

"Say, Stan, would you mind leavin' us alone for a minute? You could kind of see how that flivver is comin' along. Got quite a load in there."

Ebbtide Jones looked out the window again. "Them moons, Trixie," he muttered. "Guess I owe you somethin' for pointin' out how nice they really look."

"You were sayin'?" she said icily.

"Well, I been thinkin' it'd be a shame to split that reward up. Probably won't be much anyhow."

"Why you—"

"Hold on now. First thing you gotta learn is don't say nothin' until you're sure the last offer's been made. I also been thinkin' about how your Dad was a second-hand man in a way, an' maybe a family of second-hand men might—"

"Oh, Ebbtide."

"Hey, wait a minute. Hold on, now. Stan'll see us, an' you're getting that lipstick all over me . . . Anyway, how so you know I ain't still after your hair?"

When Stan Kendrick came back a few minutes later, he saw Jones and Trixie Green sitting contentedly by the porthole, watching a rather large and greenish meteoroid moon sail by in the velvet heavens. The mystery of the price tag on Trixie's neck, the one which said: $7.50, then $3.50, then $23.50, then $69.75—the mystery was solved.

There was a last large notation on it, in Ebbtide Jones' careful hand. It said: SOLD.

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HAVE WE A SIXTH SENSE?

By MILTON KALETSKY

A FAVORITE subject for speculation has long been the existence of a sixth sense in human beings. Often we read or hear of someone knowing something through a sixth sense, such as intuition, premonition of future things, clairvoyance or telepathy. If a sixth sense exists, we ought to discover what it is and develop it, because it would be mighty useful. If it doesn't, let's discover that too and then forget all about the sixth sense.

What is a sense anyway? Well, it's one of the five ways in which we know what's happening around and inside us. Our eyes intercept electromagnetic vibrations which we call light; our ears receive waves in the air called sound; our skin contains millions of sense organs which specialize in detecting heat, cold, pain and touch. These organs detect all stimuli that fall into the five branches of physics: light; sound; mechanics (touch and pain); thermodynamics (heat and cold); and electricity (detected by the skin's touch and pain receptors). In addition, we have two chemical senses. Through smell we discover gases and vapors around us, and through taste we become aware of liquids and solutions.

Each of these different stimuli which acts upon us is detected by a definite organ located in a definite place. The most careful examination of human bodies by the most skillful anatomists has failed to reveal any structure which might be a sixth sense organ.

Suppose we try to figure out what sort of sixth sense we might have, if we had it. We could use a magnetically sensitive organ which would always tell us exactly in what direction we were moving, a sort of built-in compass. It would be fine to have something that would instantly tell us the exact chemical composition of substances we encountered. And a weather-forecasting sense would be useful too, something which would inform us beforehand of next week's weather, more accurately than Grandma's rheumatic knee.

But we haven't these useful sense-organs because they weren't needed by the animals from which man developed in the past hundred million years. Those animals had only three things on their minds: to eat, to avoid being eaten, and to mate. For these purposes, five senses were enough Hence, no sixth sense. So far, man has gotten along rather well with the same five senses. Hence, no sixth sense, at least not yet.

However, man differs from the lower animals in possessing a highly developed nervous system, especially the brain, and those who believe we have a sixth sense usually say the brain is the additional sense organ. They speak of thought waves being sent out and received by the brain, and support this claim by remarkable stories of clairvoyance, telepathy, mind-reading, and so forth.

At one time or another, we've all guessed what was in someone else's mind, and at first glance this looks as if thought waves were being sent from one mind to another. However, expert psychologists who have carefully investigated these cases have shown that when you guess what another person is thinking you do it by following the same train of thought as that person, because you know what situation he is in and you can *guess* his thoughts. You don't do it by picking up thought waves, for waves can be sent out only through a vibrating system, and the brain doesn't vibrate. Therefore, thought waves do not exist.

Waves are of two types: those caused by vibrations of a solid body (sound, water waves, etc.), which we detect by the skin or by the eye. In our bodies there is just one vibrating system, the vocal cords, which produce sound only. We do have an electrical system in our nerves, but here there are direct currents only, not the alternating current required to produce waves.

The only waves definitely given off by a human body are heat rays, and these are in no way different from the heat waves emitted by red-hot iron, the stars, or any other body in the universe whose temperature is above absolute zero. Moreover, these human heat waves are not emitted by any special organ, but by every cell and atom in the body equally. Therefore, if we do have a sixth sense, it has nothing to do with waves or the brain.

Clairvoyance, telepathy, intuition and the like, though sometimes very impressive, are unfortunately always vague and uncertain, and can usually be dismissed as mere guesses and coincidences. So far, no one has *scientifically* demonstrated clairvoyant or telepathic powers. Even the remarkable experiments of Professor J. B. Rhine of Duke University on Extra-Sensory Perception (fancy name for clairvoyance and telepathy) haven't yielded a conclusion acceptable to the majority of psychologists. These experiments are the only truly scientific attempt to discover a sixth sense ever made.

So science fiction authors take heed; it's certain we have only five senses. If you must give your characters additional senses, put them a million years in the future, when man may have developed some new senses . . . and some sense, too.

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»»»» Introducing ««««

THE AUTHOR

FESTUS PRAGNELL — Author of WAR OF HUMAN CATS

THE PRAGNELLS are a breed of sturdy, hard-working but obstinate farmers. In a cluster of little villages in Wiltshire in the heart of rural England, about every third person one meets is a Pragnell. The farther one goes from this center the fewer Pragnells one meets. They do not seem to travel willingly. They much prefer to remain in one spot, but get forced outwards by the pressure of continually increasing numbers at the fountain head.

Hearing my old grandfather, who now is no more, pronounce his name in his broad accent, "Prrr-ooognell" ("O" as in "hog") makes one realize that there is not much difference between that and "Paaaa-rnell".

I was born into a very poor home. We lived a sort of nomad life, wandering from town to town as my father sought employment first in one place and then in another. Even in those days, 1905-1914, there was a lot of unemployment, and if a man was unemployed he starved and his children with him.

War came, turning everything upside down. Food was scarce, but money was more plentiful. There was no unemployment. Father became a baker's roundsman.

FESTUS PRAGNELL

War passed. It had washed away many things. It had washed my father firmly into a settled job as a baker's roundsman, and the family into a settled home in Southampton. We were still poor, but the real grinding poverty, the days without food, the months with nothing but bread to eat, were over.

I was a pale, fat, sensitive, highly imaginative child. My one amusement was reading. At nine years old I was fascinated by Wells's science fiction in old volumes of magazines in a public library, and looked hungrily for more like it, finding none until I ran across Amazing Stories sixteen years after.

At fourteen I had to help augment the family income. I was put to work on the railroad. I loathed it. The rough ways of the men seemed terrible after my puritanical upbringing. I didn't want to be a railwayman.

A failure at that, I tried printing. That was better, but still I failed.

People said to me, "You must work to live," but my unspoken reply was always, "But I don't want to live. I have never wanted to live."

The sight of deep water or the rushing wheels of a train drew me, fascinated, with the thought of the peace I could find there. I never had the resolution actually to attempt suicide, but I deliberately ignored danger, and had several narrow escapes.

At eighteen I realized that I had to live, whether I wanted to or not. I started work in an umbrella shop as an umbrella repairer. I really was trying hard, but there was nothing to try for. The umbrella trade was dying. I was on a sinking ship.

Then I applied to join the London Police Force. Passing the tests, I became a policeman. Now prospects seemed good. We were told that each of us "carried a field-marshal's baton in his knapsack". Then I found that for me there was nothing but tramping the streets all my life. I gave up the Police Force.

I tried to get into the British Civil Service as an Inspector of Taxes. I passed the examination with many marks to spare, but when questioning revealed my lowly origin the door was slammed in my face. I had the ability, but not the silver spoon.

After leaving the Police Force I had for a time a reasonably good job, but I lost it due to ill-health. I suffer from one of those mysterious "Allergic" diseases, which cause certain substances to turn into violent poisons inside one's body. In my case the substance is beet sugar. And Britain, remembering the sugar shortage of 1914-18, is kept full of beet sugar.

The one ambition of my life now is to live in America, where a real interest is taken in science, and where there is no beet sugar.

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Quiz Page

The following quiz has been prepared as a pleasant means of testing your knowledge of things scientific and pseudo-scientific. We offer it solely for the pleasure it gives you and with the hope that it will provide you with many bits of information that will help you to enjoy the stories in this magazine. If you rate 50% correct in your answers, you are considerably ahead of the average. Give yourself 3⅓ points for each correct answer.

EVERY DAY DRUGSTORE CHEMISTRY

Were you to go into a drug store, sit down at the counter and (chemically speaking) order (A) a container of sodium chloride (NaCl), (B) a beaker of hydrogen oxide, (C) some Ag instruments, (D) a hexadecane (CnHn+2) wrapped paper tube and (E) a very hot drink containing a weak solution of tannic acid, the waitress would set before you:

(A) .....
(B) .....
(C) .....
(D) .....
(E) .....

After finishing your fast (and not in the least refreshing) repast you might stop at the drug counter and, still speaking chemically ask for (F) a bottle of liquid made up of sodium hydrate, potasium hydrate, cottonseed oil and alcohol.

The clerk might say, "Sorry, we are all out that in its commercial form and it would take a little time to make it up. Wouldn't a fine bar of (F) sodium hydroxide and alcohol do just as well."

"Yes," you might answer. "And I would also like to have a bottle of (H) H_2O_2 for my sister and a box of (I) acetylsalicylic acid pills.

"Oh, and don't forget to include a preparation made up of calcium carbonate, castile soap, saccharin, oil of birch and oil of peppermint in my package."

What items were included in your conversation with the druggist?

(F) .....
(G) .....
(H) .....
(I) .....
(J) .....

TAKE YOUR CHOICE

1. Marconi wheat is noted for its (a) static electricity, (b) high gluten content, (c) ability to grow in moist climates, (d) ease to harvest.

2. Jejunum is the name of (a) a one celled animal, (b) an Indian ceremonial dance, (c) cotton fibre, (d) middle portion of the small intestine.

3. Alpha-rays are (a) weak ultra violet rays, (b) rays set up by a current passing through a copper wire, (c) one of the radiations of radium, (d) a ray liberated by an x-ray tube.

4. A Gila Monster is (a) a type of sea monster, (b) European legless lizard, (c) the only lizard that is poisonous, (d) erroneous name for the Horned lizard.

5. A parsec is (a) 3.2 light years, (b) a new star, (c) a vegetable used for seasoning, (d) light-giving power of a star.

WHICH ONE ? ? ?

(1) The temperature at which the Fahr. and the Cent. thermometers agree is 56 degrees, —75 degrees, —40 degrees, 40 degrees.

(2) The satellite that has the lowest period of revolution is—Phobos, Callisto, Mimas, Ariel, Fifth satellite of Jupiter.

(3) One of the following is not a moon of Saturn—Tethys, Umbriel, Enceladus, Iapetus, Hyperion, Phoebe.

(4) The planet with the greatest density is—Venus, Mars, Earth, Uranus, Neptune, Jupiter, Saturn, Mercury, Pluto.

(5) Illumination varies—inversely as the square of the distance from the source, inversely as the square root of the distance from the source.

TRUE OR FALSE?

(1) A gyroscope is the fastest turning wheel in existence. True..... False.....

(2) You can light a cigarette with live steam. True..... False.....

(3) Reno, Nevada is farther east than Los Angeles, California. True..... False.....

(4) Chlorophyll can be synthesized. True..... False.....

(5) The Carnegie Institute at Washington maintains the Mt. Wilson Observatory. True..... False.....

(6) Glaciers have been found in volcano craters. True..... False.....

(7) Vegetation does not grow at 20,000 feet above sea level. True..... False.....

(8) The Pamir Plateau is known as the roof of the world. True..... False.....

(9) We can see all sides of the sun. True..... False.....

(10) Paleontology is the name of a recently discovered Egyptian tablet. True..... False.....

(Answers on page 145)

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READER'S PAGE

A DILLY!

Sirs:

Just finished the May issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and have to tell you what I think about it. This is my first attempt at "telling off" the editor, but here goes:

First of all: "The Whispering Gorilla" by Don Wilcox was a "dilly" and I don't mean perhaps. Swell plot and lots of it. Glad to see Wilcox will be back next month!

"Worlds at War" and "Shining Man" about on a par with me. Milton Kaletsky's debut was fair from this easy chair, but a bit off the track.

Yours for bigger and better FANTASTICS.

Vance H. Orchard,
Box 811,
Burien, Wash.

Don Wilcox can well be proud of his story, which received much commendation. Wilcox has taken first place with almost every story he has written, which probably means we were right a year ago, when we predicted that Don would be a writer worth watching.—Ed.

"I MUCH APPROVE"

Sirs:

I am an ardent lover of science fiction and naturally this being so, have read every issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES so far. I very much approve of the idea of making FANTASTIC a standard size magazine, but please continue giving us back cover illustrations of Life on other Worlds.

Horace J. Hervey,
250 Clay St.,
Trenton, N. J.

This letter is one of hundreds approving our change to small size, thereby making FANTASTIC ADVENTURES more convenient to read and easier to handle. However, your editors were deluged also with hundreds of letters "taking him over the hurdles" from readers who did not like the change. At least, the liveliest Readers' Page in many a moon resulted. And our debate is likely to go on for several issues. In the following letters, we will present some of the views both pro and con.—Ed.

VIGOROUS PROTEST

Sirs:

I protest—I protest most vigorously. What's the idea of changing the sizes of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES? Who's responsible for such a faux pas? Who in the world could have even thought of such a thing? What do you mean by claiming that we asked for it? According to what I read there was an overwhelming praise for the large size. The large cover was one of the factors which made FANTASTIC ADVENTURES what it is. I definitely don't want this change in size. "Easy to handle. Easy to read". That certainly is a lame excuse. You're not thinking (I hope) of reducing the size of AMAZING STORIES, are you?

By the way, how about a novel by E. R. Burroughs. If you get a John Carter story I'll forgive anything you might be prompted to do in this mad state of yours.

John J. Norman,
1530 St. Nicholas Ave.,
New York City.

Quite candidly, during the past year, the readers of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES have repeatedly pointed out the awkwardness of the old large size, and even at the expense of reduced illustration sizes, they felt reduction in magazine size was desirable. Therefore, in answer to your question, the readers DID ask for it. And our figures on this issue seem to bear us out.

However, you give us a very handy "out". We intend to give you better stories than you have ever read in any fantasy magazine before. And we know that when you read them, you'll keep your promise to forgive us in our mad state.—Ed.

MOST POWERFUL STORY

Sirs:

"The Whispering Gorilla" is not only by far the best story to appear in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES to date, but also, one of the most powerful stories in the entire field of Fantastic fiction so far this year.

D. B. Thompson,
3136 Q St.,
Lincoln, Nebr.

"WHAT'S THE DIFF?"

Sirs:

So "they" want the magazine to be cut down, eh? Well, why don't some builders stop building high buildings; others don't make such high ones. My vote is keep the magazine up; it's easier to find.

Your covers? Well, as long as the blood is paint and ink what's the diff?

I've just started the May issue. S. Mulford sure got part of "The Whispering Gorilla" in his front cover. The ending was good for a change. The return of the Gorilla ought to come next with him having recovered his senses.

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29x5.00-19	2.85	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25
6.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
6.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55
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32x6.50-20	3.75	1.75
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32x4	2.95	1.25
33x4	2.95	1.25
34x4	3.25	1.35
32x4½	3.35	1.45

Size	Tires	Tubes
32x4½	$3.45	$1.45
34x4½	3.45	1.45
30x5	3.65	1.65
32x5	3.75	1.75
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34x6	4.25	2.25
32x6	7.95	2.95
36x6	9.95	4.45

Size	Tires	Tubes
34x7	$10.95	4.65
38x7	10.95	4.65
36x8	11.45	4.95
40x8	13.25	4.95

TRUCK BALLOON TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
6.00-20	$3.75	$1.65
7.50-20	4.45	1.95
7.00-20	5.35	2.65

Size	Tires	Tubes
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9.75-20	13.95	6.45

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The rest of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES looks good. I haven't read the issue yet (except for Reader's Page). How about those educational stories? You might add to the list the possibilities and nearness of space travel.

Paul Corning, Jr.,
St. Louis County, Mo.

You seem to have struck a note many of our readers hit. The story is the thing, and the size of the magazine really doesn't matter. And with the Williams yarn in this issue, the really unusual O'Brien, and Festus Pragnell's best to date, we think we can prove you are right when you say: "What's the diff?"—Ed.

EVERYTHING BY ROCKLYNNE

Sirs:

Here is a sequel to my letter in the June FANTASTIC ADVENTURES—with more brickbats than bouquets this time, I fear.

1. There is too much emphasis on violent action to the detriment of the plot and characterization. Notable exceptions to this include most of Bond's efforts, everything by Rocklynne, and the fine May feature story, "The Whispering Gorilla".

2. There is too much "mushy love". Legitimate love interest such as that in the Gorilla and Bond's Biggs series, is, of course, quite all right, when it is an essential part of the story, and is not unduly emphasized.

3. The rush order stories are *not* up to the usual standard of the authors writing them. "Dr. Destiny, Master of the Dead" is decidedly inferior to some of Williams' other stories.

4. All in all, the magazine lives up to its name much too closely for my individual taste. I prefer SCIENCE fiction, not just wild adventure yarns.

5. Of course, I'll continue reading FA. I read almost everything remotely resembling science fiction; and as long as you continue printing one story a month as good as "The Reflection That Lived", I'll continue to look forward to each issue.

D. B. Thompson,
3136 Q. St.,
Lincoln, Nebr.

Your editors too, were tickled with the Rocklynne short. It was very unusual and we have yet to receive a kick on this story. We have more by Rocklynne coming up.—Ed.

KRUPA BEST ILLUSTRATOR

Sirs:

I have just read your June issue and I was overwhelmed.

Dr. Destiny would have fitted into a Horror magazine much better. Is this an indication of the type of stories you intend to print henceforth? I sincerely hope not. Up until now I have had no complaint against your magazine, but I think this warrants one. Such stories shouldn't be printed in a magazine I once called science fiction.

On the other hand I found that the other stories were exceptionally well written. Bond gets first place as usual. Ayre second, Lewis third, a tie between Rocklynne and Storm for fourth. Fifth place goes to Duclos, Repp garners sixth and of

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course Williams seventh.

Krupa is the best interior illustrator in the business. You were indeed fortunate when you acquired him.

Here's to continued success with your new size.

Art R. Sehnert,
Sec-Dir: Tennessee Fictioneers,
791 Maury, Apt. No. 1,
Memphis, Tenn.

We'd like very much to know what the Tennessee Fictioneers think of Mr. Williams' current effort, "The Golden Princess"? Mr. McCauley's magnificent cover was the inspiration for it.—Ed.

"I DOUBLE DARE YOU!"

Sirs:

I've been reading your magazine ever since its first issue. I've been more than proud of its distinguished appearance, overshadowing all the other publications on the newsstands. But now—now—as a "little surprise" you suddenly come out with the cheapest looking magazine ever! At last—after years of cultivating FANTASTIC ADVENTURES into a good-looking and well made magazine, you have succeeded in placing it in a niche of cheapness!

I know the stories are still as good as ever, but I can see that I shall have a hard time convincing my friends that such a sleazy, common looking magazine is capable of anything but sleazy, common stories. Keep this up and you'll have yourself in with the other "thrillers"—whether you deserve it or not.

Furthermore, even the styles of your many accomplished artists seem to have changed. No longer can you boast about your drawings—there's nothing to boast about—or maybe I'm just bitter about the whole thing.

Anyway—the distinguished appearance of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES was its ace drawing card—get rid of this and you lose your prestige!

So give me back the old and better form of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES—or gimme back my twenty cents! It just doesn't seem worth it!

Nancy Gilmour,
2476 Marie Anne,
Montreal, Que., Can.

P.S.—Go ahead print *this* "fan letter"!
I double-dare you!

There it is, Nancy. We printed it. But really now, you won't quit reading your old friend just because he's a little sawed-off at the legs, especially when there actually is a bit more entertainment in the pages than previously? Give us a try in our new format, Nancy, and we think you'll find so many entertaining hours that you'll come to agree that it isn't "any great shucks" after all, what size we are.—Ed.

IN SUPPORT OF YE EDITOR

Sirs:

For a good many years I have read science fiction magazines, in fact I read AMAZING STORIES since 1926. When I get a copy of either one of your magazines the first thing I read is the Readers Page. So many of the regulars write for the old time stories, but I agree with you when you state that present stories are much better than the drab, long drawn out affairs of years back.

At present I get two magazines a month: AMAZING and FANTASTIC. I haven't missed a copy of FANTASTIC, but if you do not stop such glaring errors in your illustrations I will get all burned up at you. All kidding aside, you are missing too many. Your latest is the best of all. Good old "Screw Ball" Lefty Lopez is wearing a glove on the left hand.

I enjoy FANTASTIC ADVENTURES so much I wanted to tell you just how good it was, but I got off the track. How about one request—a story from an old timer: Laurance Manning.

R. E. Muschlitz,
130 N. 7th St.,
Allentown, Pa.

Other readers have said the same thing, and several of them actually went back and reread several old issues, comparing the quality of the fiction presented ten years ago with the quality of the modern science fiction and fantasy yarn. Except for a few classics, the difference is immediately apparent. Our modern fiction is far superior in all respects. —Ed.

FIFTEEN FOLLOWERS AGAIN

Sirs:

Here we are again with our second letter to your magazine. We wish to thank you for printing our letter in the May issue. We are rating the stories in the April issue only as most of our group have just gotten the May issue only a little while ago. The stories are rated as follows:

(1) The Madness of Lancelot Biggs.Bond
(2) The Blue Tropics .....Norman
(3) The Judging of the Priestess....Bond
(4) Land of Wooden Men.....Broome
(5) The Man the World Forgot....Cabot
(6) Norris Tapley's Sixth Sense....Repp
(7) Queen of the Metal Men.....Bloch

Here are some more things we discussed at our meeting:

Best author: Eando Binder.
Best Illustrator: Shomburg.
Best cover artist: Rogers.
Friendliest editor: Rap.
Funniest authors: (1) Nelson S. Bond
(2) Milton Kaletsky.
Most promising new author: Milton Kaletsky.

We thought that the best features in the issue were as follows:

(1) The Editor's Notebook
(2) Fantastic Humans
(3) Life on Uranus
(4) Reader's Page
(5) Introducing the Author

	In favor of	*Against*
FANTASTIC with capital letter on cover	15	0
Have at least 8 cartoons an issue	13	2

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Fifteen Followers of Fantasy Fiction
Ben Luna, Jr., President,
Florence, Ala.

As usual, the letter of this group speaks for itself.—Ed.

HE SEETHES—WE EXAGGERATE

Sirs:

I was seething with fury when I finished this issue.

Cut out these fairy tales and those lost valley stories and give us some real science stories like:

95% Captives of the Void
95% Purple Conspiracy
95% Pioneer 57
90% Lunar Intrigue
90% Robot Peril
90% Man From Hell
90% White Raider
95% Invaders From Sirius
95% Man Who Saw Too Late
90% Invisible Robinhood
90% City Under the Sea

Trouble with you (Ed) is that you exaggerate much too much. Every so often anyway, but excuse the harsh language, after all this is only one man's opinion.

Romeo Fascione,
3826 E. 144th St.,
Cleveland, O.

Okay, Romeo, we'll bear that list in mind, and thanks a million for listing your favorite stories, and your rating of them. It is an imposing list. We'll try to get more like them. Maybe you'll list "War of Human Cats" in this issue among that group later on.—Ed.

LIKES NEW FORMAT

Sirs:

Just bought the June issue of "Fantastic Adventures. I like the new format very much, and every story looks like a "pip". The only things that kind of go "against the grain" are: first—where is the back cover by Paul?, second—your announcement that "Fantastic Adventures" is to be a bi-monthly!!!!!!

Eddie Smart,
Mt. Vernon, Maine.

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is now a member of an advertising group which includes AMAZING STORIES and SOUTH SEA STORIES, and therefore, back covers have had to be dropped from them all, in favor of advertising contracts which we, as editors, can't quite ignore.—Ed.

MORE SHORT-SHORTS

Sirs:

I like your idea of having more than six stories per issue, keep it up. Let's have more short-shorts, like THE REFLECTION THAT LIVED, and THE MAN WHO CAME BACK.

If you won't print them in Fantastic or Amazing, why not have another sister magazine that features only weird fiction?

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Love FINDS REVENGE

SO Kathie thinks I'm a beachcomber . . . a bum . . . a worthless derelict past all salvaging, eh? Jim Rand's rum-dulled brain accepted this sophistry as truth . . . and why not? Half-caste Luweena was paganly alluring; her lips held promise of willing surrender!

Rand took the native girl in his arms. "I'm pulling out of here, Luweena. You want to go along?" Her sleek tawny body quivered at the thought of these tempting words.

"Where will we go, my lover?"

"Anywhere that'll make me forget this whole damned outfit!" Rand said huskily. His voice was thick with fiery liquor! Then a crooked grin came to his mouth. "But first, we'll have our vengeance, Luweena! . . . to hell with the plantation . . . to hell with old man Vandoep . . . and to hell with Kathie."

What vengeance did this rum-pot plantation overseer and half-caste native girl plan? How was their plot foiled? . . . and eventually a boomerang at their own objectives?

Here's a story by Robert Leslie Bellem that's packed with exciting adventure, romance and action . . . an intriguing yarn of the South Seas that will thrill you from beginning to end! Read THE REVENGE OF JIM RAND . . . in the

AUGUST ISSUE

South Sea STORIES

6 OTHER THRILLING STORIES!

Including:

★ **THE WOMAN WHO TURNED TRAITOR—by Alexander Blade.** It's bad enough to lose the woman you love, but when you do her a favor, and she pays you back by turning traitor and ruining your chance at a valuable mail contract . . . !

★ **TROUBLE ON TUMOA—by A. R. Steber.** There was something mighty fishy about John Ahu, college-bred cannibal, and his important cargo of farming implements. What made these tools more valuable than life?

★ **TREASURE OF THE DEAD—by David Wright O'Brien.** Insane jealousy of his partner made Monte Mason plot murder. But then a sunken treasure of gold threw a different light on the matter, and the plot became more complicated . . . !

★ **CHEAP LOVE—by Robert Moore Williams.** Jim Doyle spent six months lying around in this tropic paradise trying to locate a treasure trove, *then he got to liking it. Until he learned the* meaning of native love!

AT ALL NEWSSTANDS JUNE 20th!

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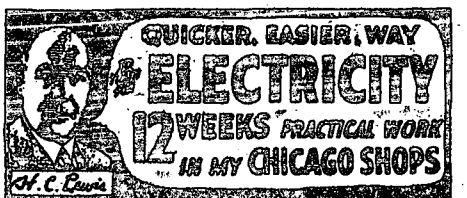
S. J. JORGENSEN, 1568 Maritime Bldg., Seattle, Wash.



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Please send me free your big catalog and full particulars of above offer.

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(Continued from page 140)

The rest of the stories were typical of Fantastic. If you would have covered up the author's name under THE WORLD IN THE ATOM, I would have sworn that it was by Ray Cummings. THE GENIUS OF LANCELOT BIGGS takes first. THE AMAZON FIGHTS AGAIN, second. THE MAN WHO CAME BACK, THE WORLD IN THE ATOM, and THE REFLECTION THAT LIVED, are all tied for third. TROUBLE IN AVALON, and SABOTAGE ON MARS, are also tied, for fourth. DR. DESTINY, MASTER OF THE DEAD, take last. If Dr. Destiny would have been written a little better, the June issue would have been the best one ever put out.

Wallace Buchholz,
330 Spaulding Ave.,
Ripon, Wis.

You'll notice we have another of those little shorts in this issue. Donald Bern does "The Ray That Failed".—Ed.

"SEVENTEEN SONS OF SCIENCE-FICTION"

Sirs:

This, our fourth letter to Fantastic Adventures, is one of protest. Yes, we are protesting the new size of the magazine that was in all probability destined to become as great a best seller as its companion, Amazing Stories.

We realize that its story content will be just as good as it has been in the past, but it will not remain as a milestone in the scientifiction and fantasy field. We came to regard it as we did the old large size editions of Amazing Stories, which surely were "tops." The size was distinct and the edges neatly trimmed. The drawings of such artists as Frank R. Paul and Leo Morey were much better in appearance in large size editions.

We urge you to return it to its regular large size.

Seventeen Sons of Science-Fiction,
Edward V. Davis, Pres.

Remember when we changed the logo of Amazing Stories from the old comet-tail to the new streamlined type? Many of our old readers protested, but now none ever do. Perhaps you'll find the new FANTASTIC still "tops" if you will continue to compare its merits with other magazines in the field.—Ed.

POSITIVELY PHOTOGRAPHIC

Sirs:

The May issue was quite good, but it did not compare with the excellence of your April issue—the best of them all. *The Man the World Forgot* was splendidly thought-provoking and the illustration by Krupa was positively photographic. He did one other in this style and they both are revolutionary in magazine art. More like this, by all means. Though it is hard to decide, *Land of Wooden Men* was best and the aforementioned short, runner-up. *Blue Tropics* and the Priestess yarn share third spot. Paul and Morey are very welcome.

(Concluded on page 144)

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Martian Treasure Trap!

"We *must* find a way into the underground chambers beneath the palace ruins," snapped Crane. Gareth Crane had already noticed a small archway whose narrow stairs led down into darkness . . . beneath the palace of the kings of Ushtu, those long-dead Martian lords whose *Greatest Treasure* even mighty Kau-ta-lah had vainly coveted! But he said nothing of his discovery. Crane meant to draw out this search for Mars' *Greatest Treasure* . . . hoping for a break . . . hoping for a chance to escape his captors! But Bugeyes, Crane's Venusian servant, upset his plan to stall for time. He, too, had spotted the passageway and unthinkingly blurted out, "Boss, there are the stairs!"

Crane could have kicked the simple-minded swampman where it would do the most good. But he pretended surprise. "So there is," he exclaimed. "That may be the way down!" What *grim fate* awaited this strange quintet: archeologist, Venusian, Jovian, Earthgirl and her traitorous guide? Would they dare venture down beneath the terrifying ruins of Ushtu? Don't fail to read *LOST TREASURE OF MARS by Edmond Hamilton* . . . one of the six fascinating stories you'll thoroughly enjoy in the thrill-packed

DON'T MISS THESE OTHER GREAT STORIES AND FEATURES IN THE AUGUST ISSUE

☆ **SUICIDE SQUADRONS OF SPACE by David Wright O'Brien.** The saga of the future Space Marines! A grand story by a truly great writer, of gripping conflict in the mightiest of wars . . . war in the void!

☆ **THE INCREDIBLE THEORY OF DR. PENWING by Richard O. Lewis.** You read the first of the amazing adventures of Dr. Penwing in the hollow inner world. Now read the thrilling story of his voyage to the outer crust!

☆ **THE MAN WHO KNEW ALL THE ANSWERS by Donald Bern.** Here is a unique story about a little man who found out how to read minds. Perhaps you'd think such a man would possess a tremendous advantage, but READ THE STORY!

☆ **LIFE ON OTHER WORLDS by Frank R. Paul.** Now this fascinating series of imaginative paintings, thrillingly described by Henry Gade, comes to our back cover in dynamic full color. Life on the planets—amazing creatures!

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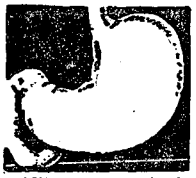

H. H. Bromley, of Shelburne, Vt., writes: "I suffered for years with acid stomach trouble. My doctors told me I had ulcers and would have to diet the rest of my life. Before taking your treatment I lost a lot of weight and could eat nothing but soft foods and milk. After taking Von's Tablets I felt perfectly well, ate almost anything and gained back the weight I had lost." If you suffer from indigestion, gastritis, heartburn, bloating or any other stomach trouble due to gastric hyperacidity, you, too, should try Von's for prompt relief. Send for FREE Samples of this remarkable treatment and details of guaranteed trial offer. Instructive Booklet is included. Write

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How many military planes has Il Duce at his command? What effect did the Civil War in Spain have on Italy's air power? How do Mussolini's planes compare with the ships of England, France and Germany? Why are engine design and production the weakest departments in Italian aviation? Leonard H. Engel, who has just returned from war-torn Europe, answers these questions for you in an authoritative account of the 1940 Italian air force. Turn to page 10 of the

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A Correspondence Institution

(Concluded from page 142)

The Whispering Gorilla is best in May, as no doubt the editor knew it would be when he included it in that issue. Wilcox is by far the best author that you have discovered, and you must have a fortunate contract with him because I have seen none of his work in other mags. *50 Miles Down* second with its pic in first place and Morey's drawing for *World's at War*, second in art division.

Charles Hidley,
New York.

We are glad you liked Krupa's "wash" drawings, which are rarely used on pulp paper because a complicated process is necessary to make them reproduce clearly. We don't have any writers under contract, and if Wilcox appears exclusively with us, the reason probably lies with his own desire to be exclusive. Naturally, we hope he keeps on giving us his material.—Ed.

TREMENDOUSLY ENTERTAINING

Sirs:

This month for the first time I have become acquainted with your publication "Fantastic Adventures" and find one of its stories really worthy of comment.

I am a secretary to a doctor here in Hollywood and I picked up your magazine as sort of a spring tonic to add to our accumulation of magazines for our reception room.

A great number of our patients have commented on one story particularly—"The Blue Tropics" by James Norman. Every one seems to be particularly impressed by the refreshing, imaginative quality of this author. I, myself, have read the piece and found it tremendously entertaining. This young man should have quite a future in imaginative fiction. We all hope that we may see a great deal more of Mr. Norman's efforts published in your magazine. With such an attraction I feel sure that "Fantastic Adventures" might become a permanent addition to our reception room collection.

Lorrayn Smith,
Hollywood, Calif.

FOUR PAGES

Sirs:

This is my first letter to any magazine of any kind. The first time I wrote this letter it was four pages long and chock full of laudatory comments. (Almost a page was devoted to Paul.) I found however that I still hadn't given half the credit due so I'm rewriting it taking the magazine as a whole.

Fantastic Adventures is the finest magazine of its kind in the world. I am proud to be a devoted reader of this splendid publication and am looking forward to the future issues and may they be even more successful than those of the past.

Warren Bowles,
200 No. 58th St.,
Birmingham, Ala.

We'd have liked to have read your four-page letter and we wish you'd sent it on, after going to all the trouble to write it. But thanks anyway, for your praise, and for writing two letters. We think you'll like this issue even better.—Ed.

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QUIZ ANSWERS
(Quiz on page 136)

EVERY DAY DRUGSTORE CHEMISTRY

A. Salt shaker containing salt. B. A glass of water. C. Silver (silverware.) D. A paraffine covered straw. E. A cup of tea. F. Liquid soap. G. Castile soap. H. Hydrogen peroxide. I. Aspirin. J. Tooth powder.

TAKE YOUR CHOICE

1. B. 2. D. 3. C. 4. C. 5. A.

WHICH ONE ? ? ?

(1) — 40 degrees.
(2) Phobos.
(3) Umbriel.
(4) Earth.
(5) Illumination varies inversely as the square of the distance from the source.

TRUE OR FALSE?

(1) False.
(2) True.
(3) False.
(4) False.
(5) True.
(6) True.
(7) False.
(8) True.
(9) True.
(10) False.

CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Jack Hill, 620 Gilmour St., Peterborough, Ont., Canada, is interested in Chemistry, Esperanto and Scouting and would like to hear from pen pals. . . . John Cunningham, 2050 Gilbert St., Beaumont, Tex., would like pen pals from U. S. A. and foreign countries, and is interested in collecting and trading stamps. . . . Albert Mendelbaum, 1243 Juniata St., N. S. Pittsburgh, Pa. has for sale a rare copy of an old SF magazine; book goes to highest bidder. . . . Stanley Arnold, 600 W. Clinton St., Frankfort, Ind. would like to purchase issues of old SF magazines. . . . Don MacTavish, Jr., 467 Albertus Ave., Peterborough, Ont., Canada, would like pen pals interested in Chemistry, Science Fiction, or Esperanto; either sex between 15-16 yrs. . . . Paul Gerhracht, 1053 W. 25th St., Erie, Pa., would like correspondents of either sex between 16-18 yrs. . . . Steve Warnar, 144 S. Broadway, Yonkers, N. Y., has for sale various volumes of weird magazines; all in good condition. . . . Robert White, 911 East Ave., Elyria, O., would like pen pals who will play chess by mail and discuss Science Fiction. . . . Leonard Panske, 2205 W. Iowa St., Chicago, Ill., has a complete set of magazines of which to dispose. . . . Bill Stolze, 900 St. Louis St., Edwardsville, Ill., would like to obtain back issues of *Amazing Stories* and other SF magazines dating before January 1939; send complete list, and his preference is for single issues. . . . Charles Biggs, c/o Mrs. Roberts, 407 S. Eden St., Baltimore, Md., would like to buy

TRAINING DOGS FOR PROTECTION

A dog trained for sheer protection of life and property is definitely an asset to the home. Step by step, Otto Wenzel, noted dog trainer, shows exactly how your dog, through methodical exercises in training, can be taught to attack and catch offenders; fight off men with guns and knives, and disarm them; guard your automobile against theft and children against kidnapers. Don't fail to read this intensely interesting article in the July issue of

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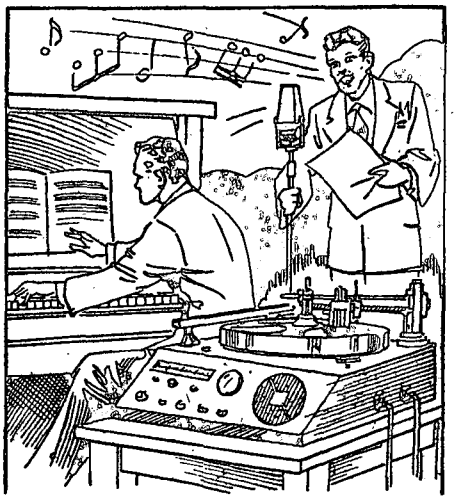

ARE YOU A RECORDING FAN?

. . . then there's a real treat in store for you in the July RADIO NEWS! If you make your own recordings or build your own recording equipment, then don't fail to read *Cuttings*, a "must" for all disc lovers! This special new, monthly feature is packed with all the latest data on recording equipment, gadgets, kinks and hints. You'll find this sparkling new and exclusive feature on page 13!

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RADIO NEWS

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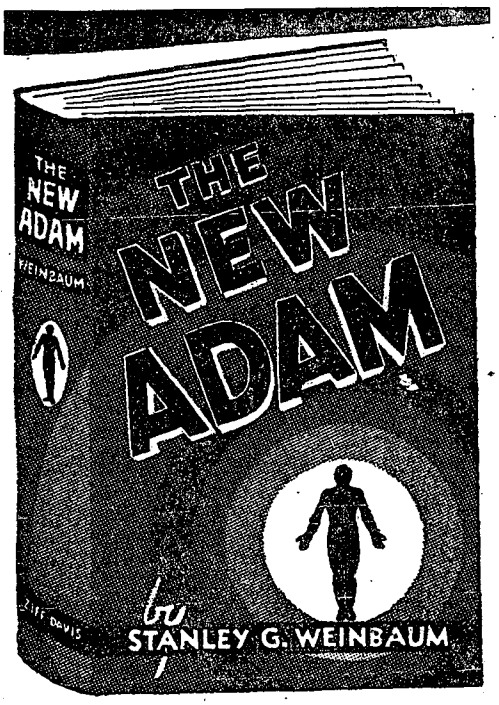

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back issues of various magazines; send lists with prices. . . . William Graham, 14½ yrs., "Sunny-Croft," Cockermouth, Cumberland, would like an American correspondent who would exchange stamps. . . . Roy Stevens, 80 Columbia St., Batavia, Ill., is an ex-soldier who collects empty match book covers, milk bottle caps, pennants, and is interested in mineralogy, geology and stamps. . . . Alfred Edward Maxwell, 648 S. Main St., Opelousas, La., would like to start a scientific club in his section, and is interested in receiving letters from those people having photography, astronomy and writing as hobbies. . . . A. E. Reid, 12, Howard Road, Leytonstone, E.11. London, England, would like to receive copies of *Amazing Stories* and other SF magazines. . . . E. R. White, 73 Taunton Road, Toronto, Ont., Canada, belongs to a club whose aim it is to further science fiction in Canada; anybody interested? . . .

Chester Hoey, 24 yrs., 301, 6th Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y., whose hobbies are science, sports, bike riding and one-man Abe Lyman band, invites those with problems to confide in him and he will help. . . . Charles Ruffing, 436 W. Glenaven Ave., Youngstown, Ohio, wants correspondents interested in stamp collecting, photography and amateur journalism. . . . Ernest L. Brown, 215 N. St. Louis Blvd., South Bend, Ind., would like to contact SF fans in his locality who are interested in forming a SF club. . . . James E. Richardson, 833 Park Ave., Vineland, N. J., will exchange picture view post cards with pen pals of any age. . . . Bob Muldoon, 1113 Glencairn Ave., Toronto, Ontario, Canada, who is 14 yrs. will answer all letters from pen pals, either sex; any subject and will trade postcards. . . . R. J. Moran, Box 137, S. Connellsville, Pa., wishes to sell back issues of *Amazing Stories* and other SF magazines to SF fans; 10c each, in good condition with covers intact. . . . William J. Maconlier, 709 E. Venango St., Philadelphia, Pa., would like correspondents interested in science, chemistry, Spanish music (classics and Spanish), or anything that offers a problem. . . . Frank Hinckley, 22 yrs., Box 53, Lomita, Calif., is an expert ice-skater and desires pen pals. . . . Franklin James, 2302 Cakes, Everett, Washington, has for sale *Amazing Stories'* Annual, Quarterlies, etc. . . . Frank S. Cook, 184 Dowling Ave., Toronto, Ontario, Canada, is desirous of correspondents anywhere, but particularly Australia and New Zealand; interested in ornithology. . . . Byron Kelham, Rt. 9, Box 438, Portland, Ore., would like pen pals under 15 yrs. of age. . . . Andrew Serediak, Kahwin, Alberta, Canada, would like to correspond with either sex, on any subject, from the U. S. A. and Canada. . . . Anthony Landry, 3744 Lakeshore Drive, Port Arthur, Texas, would like pen pals from Spain and South America, between ages of 13 and 15. . . . L/cp Burns Squad, No/2617901, Rct: Evans, 13th Company, Grenadier Guards, Chelsea Barracks, London. S. W. 1., England, is anxiously desirous of SF magazines and pen pals of either sex. . . .

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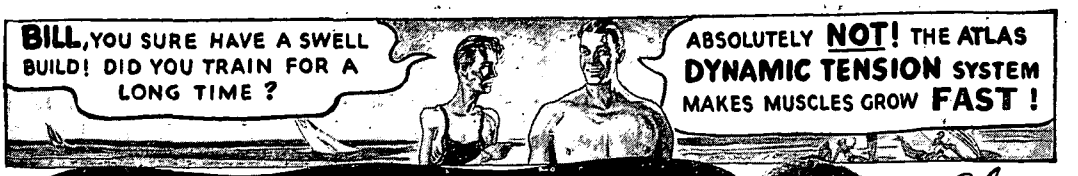
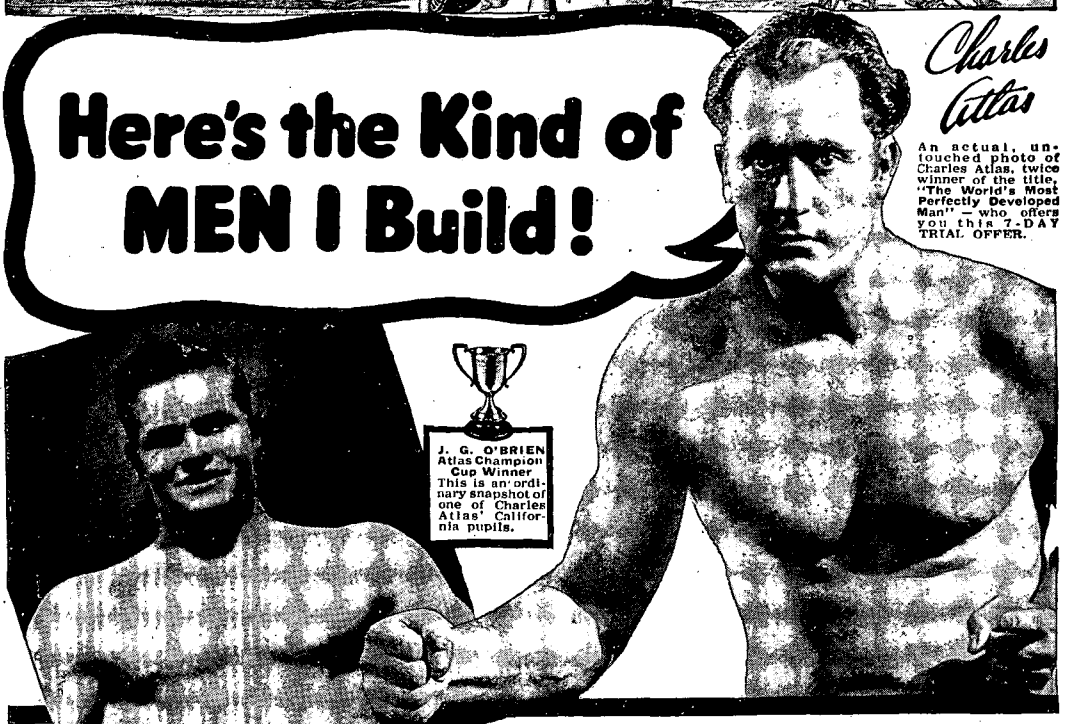


Here's the Kind of MEN I Build!



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MEN—Meet J. G. O'Brien, of California, one of my Silver Cup Winners! Look at that strong neck—those broad, handsome, perfectly proportioned shoulders—that muscled chest and stomach. Read what he says: "Look at me NOW! 'Dynamic-Tension' WORKS! I'm proud of the **natural,** easy way you have made me an 'Atlas Champion'!"

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I was once a skinny weakling of 97 lbs. I didn't know what real health or strength were. I was afraid to fight, ashamed to be seen in a swimming suit.

Then I discovered the secret that changed me into "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man," the title I won **twice** and have held **ever since,** against all comers. My secret is **Dynamic Tension.** It is a **natural** method. Its purpose is *not only to* give you the powerful, rippling muscles you'd like to see in your own mirror, but also—for those whose systems are sluggish for lack of proper exercise—to help them tone their entire body, inside and out.

Just give me a week! Make me prove—in even that short time—that continuing with my "Dynamic-Tension" method will make a **New Man** of you—give you bodily power and drive, and put you in magnificent physical condition which wins you the envy and respect of everyone.

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Send Coupon

Don't Pay Until Relieved

According to the Government Health Bulletin No. E-28, at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

HERE'S HOW TO RELIEVE IT

The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy the germ; whereas, upon contact, laboratory tests show, H. F. will kill the germ Tinea Trichophyton within 15 seconds.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's Foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. H. F. gently peels the skin which enables it to get to parasites that exist under the outer cuticle.

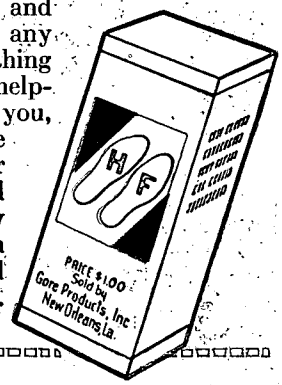
ITCHING OFTEN RELIEVED QUICKLY

As soon as you apply H. F. you may find that the itching is relieved. You should paint the infected parts with H. F. night and morning until your feet are better. Usually this takes from three to ten days.

H. F. should leave the skin soft and smooth. You may marvel at the quick way it brings you relief. It costs you nothing to try; so if you are troubled with Athlete's Foot, why wait a day longer.

H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us $1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.



GORE PRODUCTS, INC. N.F.
845 Perdido St., New Orleans, La.

Please send me immediately a bottle of H. F. for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you $1. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE .....

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